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**FLOURISHING SERVICE AND QUALITY IN TOURISM  
EDUCATION**

**Case Study: Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences**

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## ABSTRACT

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<p>The thesis was commissioned by Jennie Elfving, research and development manager of Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences (COU). The main focus of the research was to improve service and quality of tourism education and to assess development opportunities in COU. In Finland, the Degree programme in tourism in COU has one of the largest student intakes. The international degree programme is relatively new and many foreign students attend the degree programme. It is important to conduct such research to develop the degree programme.</p> <p>Extensive literature review was done to co-relate education with service management theories. To make it highly reliable both quantitative and qualitative research methods were applied to complete the research. An e-survey was conducted with full time degree students and a group interview was performed with six exchange students.</p> <p>The outcome of the research showed that most students came to study tourism to COU because of the good quality of education. The overall study environment was perceived as relatively higher than average but in terms of meeting expectations it indicated lower than average performance. The library required more subject related books and instead of teaching many foreign languages the local language studies should be emphasised to foreign students. The administration could consider putting further effort on making theoretical knowledge more real life connected. A clear image should be created by sending precise messages to minimise the gap between expectations and experiences. Finally, proper strategic planning and execution should be performed to attain higher quality in tourism education.</p>		

## Keywords

Competitiveness of tourism education, Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences, educational research, Finnish tourism education, qualitative research, quantitative research, improving service and quality in education, tourism education, tourism education in Finland

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a very young subject to study compared to other subjects like philosophy, history or economics. To be highly benefitted through tourism industry is to study the subject with great importance. Special attention is required to improve the subject area. A small amount of researches have been done in this field of study area but it has positioned itself as an important subject of study because of its great importance in the world economy. Currently tourism contributes 9.3% of world GDP and going to grow to 9.7% by the year 2020. Tourism has significant effects also on the environment and culture. Education brings awareness among people to utilise the best of tourism. So, a lot of research is required in this field to promote global peace and prosperity through tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2011.)

The aim of this thesis is to recognize the competitiveness of tourism education in Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences (COU) from students' aspects as they are one of the important stakeholders of the study programme. There are tourism educations for young and adult working students. This research is aimed at young students studying tourism in English. The report is based on the feedback received from the students rather than interviewing academic specialists, but several literature reviews have been done to correlate tourism studies with service concepts. This report consists of a survey which was carried out to full time students, and a group interview to exchange students. After reading this report readers will have the possibility to identify the performance of the Degree programme in Tourism from the student's point of view in COU. In the conclusion and discussion part, this report also tells about the aspects which could make the Degree Programme in Tourism more interesting and significant to properly meet the students' expectations to increase its competitiveness.

The theoretical framework describes tourism education and the very important aspects of tourism studies, and how tourism education relates to future workforce to bring innovation in the tourism industry. Services have been defined and the nature and quality of services is also being discussed. The empirical part introduces the commissioner (Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences), the importance of such research, description about the research method and the results of the research. Finally, development

opportunities will be discussed in the conclusion part to improve the competitiveness of the tourism education in Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences.

There are a few limitations of the research which could be mentioned here. As a Bachelor's degree student it is quite difficult to assess the competitiveness of a degree programme by evaluating all the internal and external environments, and due to lack of funding and time it was not possible to travel to different places to gather data from specialists. Students have been the main information contributor in this report to bring up the things that could be improved, to position COU as one of the best place for tourism education in Finland and abroad. The results of the research might not reveal the ultimate truth because it was written based on an e-survey and a group interview attended only by a few exchange students.

There are many research articles available on how to improve education services in educational institutions. Numerous researches have been conducted to improve the value of education. As tourism is a new field of study there are still lacks of researches on how to improve the tourism education in particular. There are not many studies available on how to develop the Degree programme in Tourism in COU. This could be considered as one of the first initiatives to improve the tourism education in COU by relating education to service concepts available at present.

## 2 THE SERVICE INDUSTRY

The world has been seeing many new changes in recent years. Economic powers are moving from west to east. Manufacturing of goods is dominated by emerging nations because of low labour costs. Many businesses have already moved, many are moving from west to east or changing business plans to survive by competing with developing nations. Recently, developed nations are paying more attention to service intense industries. The hospitality industry has been safe from this trend, as in service industries the customers are required to participate in the service making process. It is not possible to move the natural attractions or cultural resources available in a certain area to a totally different place. (Olsen, West & Tse 2008, 13.) Along with other developed countries Finland is also experiencing the same type of tendency of economy, moving from manufacturing to service economy. In this regard, Finland has a high opportunity to improve in the service industry.

We are seeing new trends in tourism flows from east to west. Emerging nations' citizens have more opportunity to go abroad. China's \$232 billion travel market was mainly domestic and hugely under-developed. It was not possible for Chinese traveller to go anywhere without permission. Now the new middle class people have more money to travel. (The economist 2011.)

As a neighbour of Russia, Finland enjoys the ultimate benefit of receiving wealthy Russian tourists for different purposes. In 2011, the number of Russian tourists increased by 28 percent according to Finnish statistics bureau. Overall there has been a 9 percent increase of nights spent by foreigners in Finland. (Association of tour operator of Russia 2011.)

People from emerging nations have more money to spend and travel around the world. By realizing this situation, Finland is also improving its cooperation with emerging nations to increase tourist arrivals. A few attempts of them are to be mentioned to get Authorized tourist Destination Status (ADS) from China to attract more Chinese tourists. Finland considers China as an important source of tourism due to its large achievement in economic reform and opening up to the outer world. (China International Publishing Group 2011.)



## 2.1 Education as service

Even though, there is great importance placed on services in our national economies, they have tended to be overlooked or ignored. Education which is a pure service is largely ignored due to its intangible nature. The education service is towards people, it is about their mind rather than their bodies. It also requires a lot of intangible actions. In education the relationship between service provider and service receiver is long and formal. It processes continuous delivery of the service. Students have a membership relationship with the service provider, which offers the opportunity to develop customer loyalty and enhanced customer services. (Mazzarol & Soutar 1999, 287)

Services often require customization and judgement on the part of service providers. In education service customization is variable. Small tutorials or individual lectures have more room for customization than mass lectures. In most cases, a service provider exercise of judgement in meeting the needs of individual students is high, especially with the teaching staff. Then there is a risk of arising problems of dissatisfaction because of variability of service delivery. (Mazzarol & Soutar 1999, 287).

Different services have different types of demand. Some service demand is widespread (water supply), while some is limited (such as insurance). The ability to alter the supply quickly to meet demand fluctuations varies. Water supply can be adjusted very quickly to meet peaks, but if capacity is available, the accommodation provider can find it more difficult to regulate with the situation. In education, demand is subject to relatively narrow fluctuations over time. But if there are limitations to the availability of staff and facilities for classes, then it would be difficult to manage the supply. (Mazzarel & Soutar 1999, 288)

Services can be classified into different categories according to single or multiple site outlets and the nature of the customer interaction with the service. Often customers move to a place to consume the service where they also act during the service production, or then the service provider may also move to them. Traditionally, education services required students to come to the institution to complete their studies. But recently we are experiencing changes as offshore teaching programmes and distance education providers are competing in the education industry. The four primary characteristics of service are intangibility, the inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity and

perishability. All of these characteristics can be found in education service which have to overcome by careful marketing strategies. (Mazzarel & Soutar 1999, 288)

## **2.2 Nature of services**

This definition of service is mentioned as:

A service is a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interactions between the customer and service employee and/or physical resources or goods and /or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems (Grönroos 2007, 52)

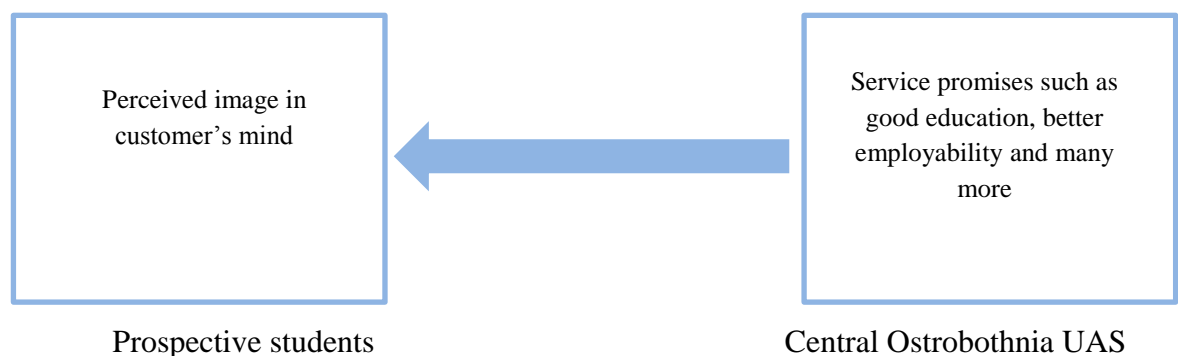
Developed economies are dominating the service sectors and this domination is increasing due to higher labour cost in the manufacturing industry on the local market. It is much cheaper to produce goods in emerging countries so developed countries are concentrating more on the service sector. Manufacturing industries produce goods but there are certain amounts of services included which are often neglected during the counting of national economies. These can be called 'hidden services'. Through a computer hardware company sales goods to customers there is a certain level of service included during the sales process, or even after the sales. Many of the manufacturing firms consider a big amount of their expenses being put on services. Considering the Nokia phone maker, they sale mobile phones but they spent a big amount of money on research, design, marketing and after sales services etc. Finance, leasing, insurance, consulting, advertising, military, education, tourism, wholesaling, transportation are a few examples of services. (Grönroos 2007, 1-3.)

### **2.2.1 Intangibility**

Service is intangible and cannot be concretely touched like products. Customers are not able to touch or experience the product before purchasing the service, unlike the products which can be tested before the actual buying. The customer has to depend on the reputation of a service provider before buying the service. It is very common that prospective students choose an education provider based on its reputation which is an important nature of services. COU has the possibility of creating such a reputation which makes students encouraged to come to study at COU instead of choosing other education providers.

Prospective customers (students) are informed about the service promises through brochures, prospectuses, TV advertisements, newspaper ads, education fairs, open days at campus, visit to high schools, own websites etc. An image is created in the students' mind about the university which is not visible to others but intangible. Through the use of registration, licence, regulation and legislation the government can assure consumers to expect a minimum standard of service (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2011, 20.)

COU has been maintaining its quality assurance system as a whole set by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. The last audit was done on 21 May 2008 and it is valid for six years (Rauhala 2008). In educational institutions an acceptable service guarantee is mediated by the government to meet the minimum service standard. The graph below shows prospective students may get some intangible services which are not possible to experience before the relationship begin.



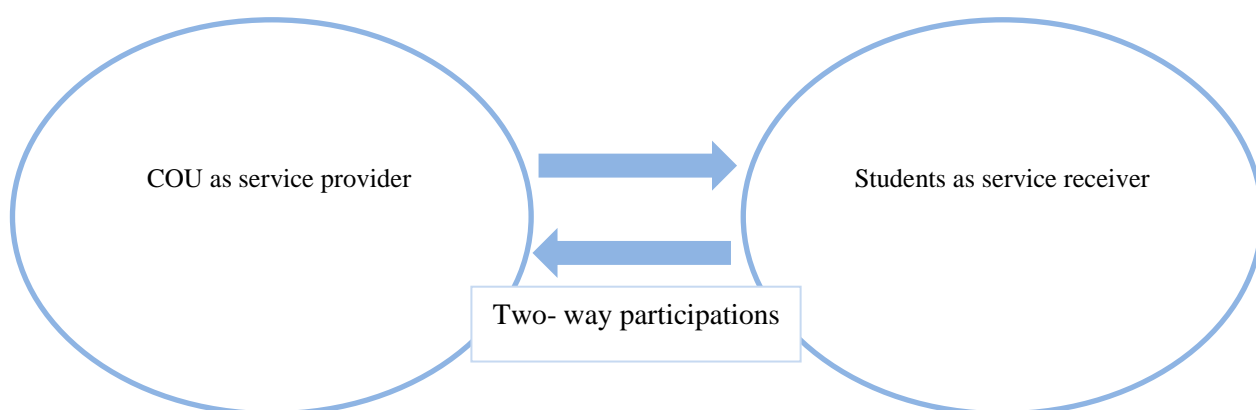
GRAPH 1. Perceived image creation

### 2.2.2 Customer participation in the service process

Unlike manufacturing, in the service industry the customer has a role to play. Customers actively take part in the service process to complete the service. Different services have varied level of customer participation. During travelling by plane a customer has to go through a wide-ranging process to complete the service, starting from the check-in to luggage collection. In a spa, the consumer might have to act according to service employees in order to complete the service. In contrast, when products are purchased

consumers are not aware of the producing method or place of production. (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2011, 18-19.).

For example, clothes can be produced in some other place than the actual user has bought them from. Education services imply a two-way participation during the service delivery. COU has expert teachers, good premises, learning environment, teaching material etc. students have to learn from the university to get the experience of learning. This is a two-way interaction between the service provider and the service receiver. During lectures students get valuable information about subjects from the teachers and are expected to listen carefully, and there might be some assignment to be done by the students within a specific time. There may be some examination to assess the learning outcome of the students and possibility to get a grade. This whole process is a both way interaction which is shown by the graph below:



GRAPH 2. Service process at COU

### 2.2.3 Simultaneity

Services once performed are not possible to store, except for some experiences. Services are created and consumed simultaneously. Inventory is used in the manufacturing industry to ease the operation strategy but the service industry is complicated in this regard. Service delivery is done in the presence of the customer, so the customer waiting time or queuing can make the service delivery process challenging. It is important to consider the time of service, number of service receivers, facility utilization and use of idle time during the

service design. Products can be inspected before their delivery to customers, but during service it is impossible to find out the problems persisting in the service as they can only be known after the service delivery (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2011, 20.)

In COU, lessons are taken at a specific time. Lessons once performed cannot be stored for future use. Students have to attend classes to complete any course module. Any missed lesson might hamper the service process. Notes can be collected from other students, or the student portal might give some information about the lesson. Once the lesson is finished it is not possible to have the same one but there is always possibility to have a different lecture from the teacher. Now with the help of technology it is possible to video record the lesson, but the lively discussion in the classroom will be still missing.

#### **2.2.4 Perishability**

A service cannot be preserved for future use. It is a challenge for service providers to meet the demand of customers in order to maximise the revenue of a firm since services have to be sold before or during the service process. If a hair dresser cannot find a customer to buy his/her services, this opportunity is lost forever because he/she would not be able to restore the time to cut somebody's hair. The demand of customers is variable and thus not possible to resolve by building inventories. Consumer behaviour regarding services possibly reflects a cyclic behaviour over shorter time periods with considerable variation between peaks and off-peaks. During lunch time the rush of orders may be experienced in a restaurant, sales may remain normal during other times of the day. The situation may be different during the holidays. A restaurant might find it difficult to get the normal crowd. Even though, there is variation of timing in customers' arrival to a restaurant, it is not possible to hold the business for another time or day. A restaurant has to either serve the customer or turn down the service opportunity (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2011, 20.)

COU has its annual intake of students during the autumn every year. After the entrance test students are chosen for admission. There is a certain number of places for students for admission. If a number of students leave the study programme it may cause a loss for the university as each study place costs. The premises, study materials, class lectures and all other facilities are used to the same extent even though some study places are still

available. So the administration tries to keep the number of study places equal to the number of students.

### **2.2.5 Heterogeneity**

The intangible nature of services and the customer as participant render different levels of service experiences from the same service provider. The experience of service may differ in great extent from customer to customer. Interactions between customer and service provider have the possibility to create more satisfying (human) work experience, and it is more oriented towards people rather than things. Automated self-service technology brings the opportunity to reduce labour intensive service. In an airport self-service check-in has become more and more common nowadays, which reduces customer contacts with the check-in desk employee. Many other services are shifting towards self-service system to reduce costs. However, there are still service which require personal attention. Personal attention creates opportunity to variability in services that are provided. (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2011, 21.)

In a higher education institution there are a great number of situations when the students have to meet with the service provider. From the day of the entrance test to the graduation date the students meet with office staff, teachers and administration etc. Each ‘moment of truth’ has the possibility to differ from student to students. Students who were admitted during the first academic year in the Tourism degree programme experienced the service environment differently than students from recent years. As COU has taken many improvement measures, by for example, changing the campus, it might give new students a new and different experience than that of previous students.

## **2.3 Defining quality in service**

Quality is one of the main keys towards success. The service industry thrives for quality excellence. Quality is the foundation of the competitive edge of a service provider. Quality standard might be regulated by authority but the judgement of the quality totally depends on customers. What is considered as good quality by some might not be considered the same by others. The concept of quality is often ambiguous due to variable acceptance by

customers. When an organization wants to implement some quality improvement measures it has to be ensured to see quality from the customer's perspective. There are seven principles to be used to guide the improvement of quality service, mentioned by L.L.Berry in his *Discovering the Soul of Service* which was discussed in Strategic management in the hospitality industry in 2008 by Olsen et al.

### **2.3.1 Quality is defined by the customer**

Goods and services are produced for customers. Customers are the main lifeline for any organization. As long as they are willing to pay for services, service providers will exist in the market. Many organizations have failed to understand the needs of customers so they have had to take from the market. In the service industry the customer has the ultimate power to decide what good quality is and what is important in service products. It is vital for the management to understand the customer's perspective. (Olsen et al. 2008, 282.) The Degree programme in Tourism in COU is designed to add value to the career of students. The level of quality service provided by COU could be measured by students as the major stakeholders. Communication with the teaching personnel and the office staff, and the facilities available in the campus is for the students as customers of education service. The extent of quality of those services can be understood from the students' point of view.

### **2.3.2 Quality is a journey**

When organizations fail to continue to strive for improvement in service quality it may transmit a bad reputation to customers. There are also other competitors on the market providing the same basic services, but customer should be able to differentiate between the quality of services offered by different organization. It is an organization's duty to make customers realize the improvement in quality of services by the service provider to retain its competitiveness. Quality has to be seen as a constant continuum. It is a journey that requires continuous improvement. The needs and expectation of customers are changing as they are exposed to new experiences and quality managers strive for improvement (Olsen et al. 2008, 282). The Degree Programme Tourism in English at COU started in 2008. It is relatively new programme which is taught entirely in English. From the beginning, COU

has been trying to find out the persisting problems and overcome those. Improvement can be noticed through recent changes in the study curriculum. There are also improvements in administration processes, teaching skills, technological equipment etc. This process should be continued to make customers realize that there are improvement in services taking place.

### **2.3.3 Quality is everyone's job**

As the quality of services is determined from the customers' own perspective, the service provider has to be aware of every "moment of truth" with the customer. Every meeting with the service provider may result in fluctuation of quality of service in the customer's mind. In the service industry the responsibility cannot be substituted to one single individual or department which is very much possible in other types of business. In an educational organization the process of providing the best quality to its customers is a collection of processes, each of which must be managed in conformance with the goals of the organization. Students as customers perceive the experience not as a whole, not as a collection of processes because every service employee and moment of truth counts (Olsen et al. 2008, 283).

The quality of the Degree Programme in Tourism depends on all the stakeholders interrelated with the study programme. Everybody has to play their own part. High qualified teaching professionals might be of no use if the students do not actively participate during the study process. In the same way, the office personnel has to provide efficient service delivery when necessary. If some technical equipment is not working it has to be repaired immediately to provide smooth service delivery.

### **2.3.4 Quality, leadership and communication are inseparable**

Service employees who have to meet with the customers in the "moment of truth" should have the opportunity to hear from the management about their service performance so they can realise their service mistake and to improve it in the future. The management must be able to provide service leadership to its employees to produce quality service experiences.



It is important to have knowledge, feedback and support from management to continue quality service process in any organization. (Olsen et al. 2008, 283.)

The quality control board in COU has to have a feedback system to stakeholders based on their performance to avoid future service mistakes. Excellent service delivery should be appreciated and service failure should be minimised by proper counselling to service employees. This applies also to students regarding how to behave during the lesson or out of class in order to achieve the best service delivery. Leadership will play an important role to complete this part in COU.

### **2.3.5 Quality and integrity are attached**

Service quality requires a socially responsible culture that emphasises integrity. Many times customers may not be aware of the breakdown of the service process. As soon as the organization realizes, it must respond to the situation by informing the customers about the service fault. Fairness toward guests and employees must be a core value shared by all the stakeholders of an organization. (Olsen et al. 2008, 283.)

Integrity is an important value which is highly appreciated in COU. Students are well informed in advance about any service breakdown that may occur. Students are informed in advance if some teachers are not able to attend classes in any case. Students have the right to know this well ahead of the actual situation taking place. If an interruption has occurred in the portal everyone is notified, even those participants who are unaware of the problem.

### **2.3.6 Quality is a design issue**

Planning of services beforehand is a requisite of providing high quality service. Service quality has to be designed in advance before the service action takes place with the customer. The ultimate goal has to be in focus before designing the service model with the use of technology, personnel and guest participation. (Olsen et al. 2008, 283.)

In COU The Degree Programme in Tourism is well planned beforehand an academic year starts. Teachers and students are informed about their scheduled classes and when they will be held, so everybody is prepared for the events. The courses are also designed and told how they will take place. Most of the courses have to be attended by the students in the classes but some of them can be studied online. The phases are well defined in the study guide.

### **2.3.7 Quality is keeping the service promise**

Quality is perceived differently by different customers. Expectation is something which shapes the value of the quality of the service. Customers with high expectations definitely look for higher value from the service provider. An organization has a great power to shape the customer's expectation. Promises made by the organization should be kept to make the customer satisfied. Failure to do so results in poor perceived quality and guest dissatisfaction. (Olsen et al. 2008, 283.)

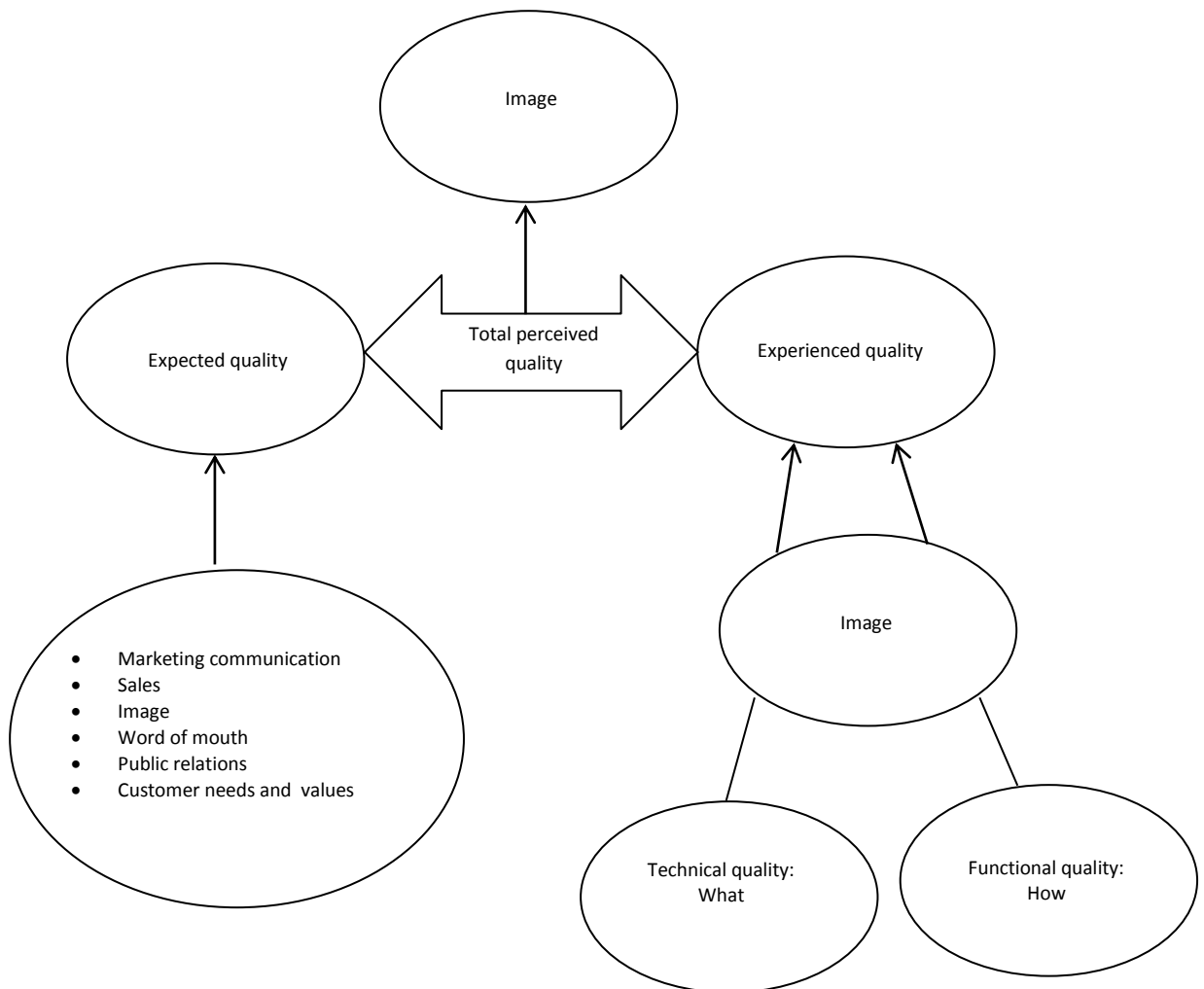
Students come to study in a university to gain a degree which will enable them to find a dream job. The Degree programme in Tourism in COU has been preparing students for graduation after completing a minimum of three and half year of studies in the tourism field. The promises have been kept to make the students prepare for their future career. When students are able to find jobs in real life it can be said that the promises have been well kept. At the same time they receive good education, career counselling, information for mental and health well-being.

## **2.4 Total perceived quality**

Quality is a large subject which is perceived subjectively and the perception process is complicated. Experience of technical and functional quality are not the only factors that determine whether a service is good, bad or neutral. Through its marketing approach certain expectations are created by the service provider. When the expectations of the customers are met is considered as good service quality. Customers' perceived quality is the gap between the experienced quality and expected quality. If the expectation is very high or unrealistic from the service provider's point of view the level of perceived quality

will be low even though the experienced quality measured objectively is good. (Grönroos 2007, 73-77)

The graph below shows how different marketing creates such expectations in the customers' mind which have to be met in order to get a good perceived quality. Technical quality means what the customer receives as a price. Functional quality has to do with how a service is performed. Many service providers may provide the same service but there may be clear differences in how the service is delivered to the customer. These both qualities create such an image after experiencing the service. The space between the experienced quality and expected quality is what is called perceived quality which reshapes the image of the service provider.



GRAPH 3. Total perceived quality (adapted from Grönroos 2007, 77)

In COU the core service is bachelor's level education which can be seen as technical quality in the graph. There are ways to accomplish that service. There are class lectures where a minimum students attendances are required in front of teachers. There are also some online courses also available for studying offered by the Open University of Applied Sciences. Both ways of learning convey some new ways of experiencing education, which ultimately helps to create an image of COU. The way students experience the quality of learning have to meet with their ideas of expected quality. Expected quality is created by receiving information from the University through different marketing channels, such as, TV trailers and newspaper advertisements, brochures, campus visits, open days, education exhibitions etc. The external marketing body of the University has to be aware of the promised services so students' expectation are not too high. The perceived quality of studying in COU would be the gap between expected quality and experienced quality.

### **3 TOURISM EDUCATION**

Education is the precondition of knowledge and knowledge is power. To be successful in a certain field it is important to have knowledge in the related field. To be successful in the tourism industry it is the best option for tourism employers to employ tourism degree students to arise as the world class service providers and students benefiting from a variety of employers to choose the right position to utilise their knowledge and skills in that field (Tourism Review 2011).

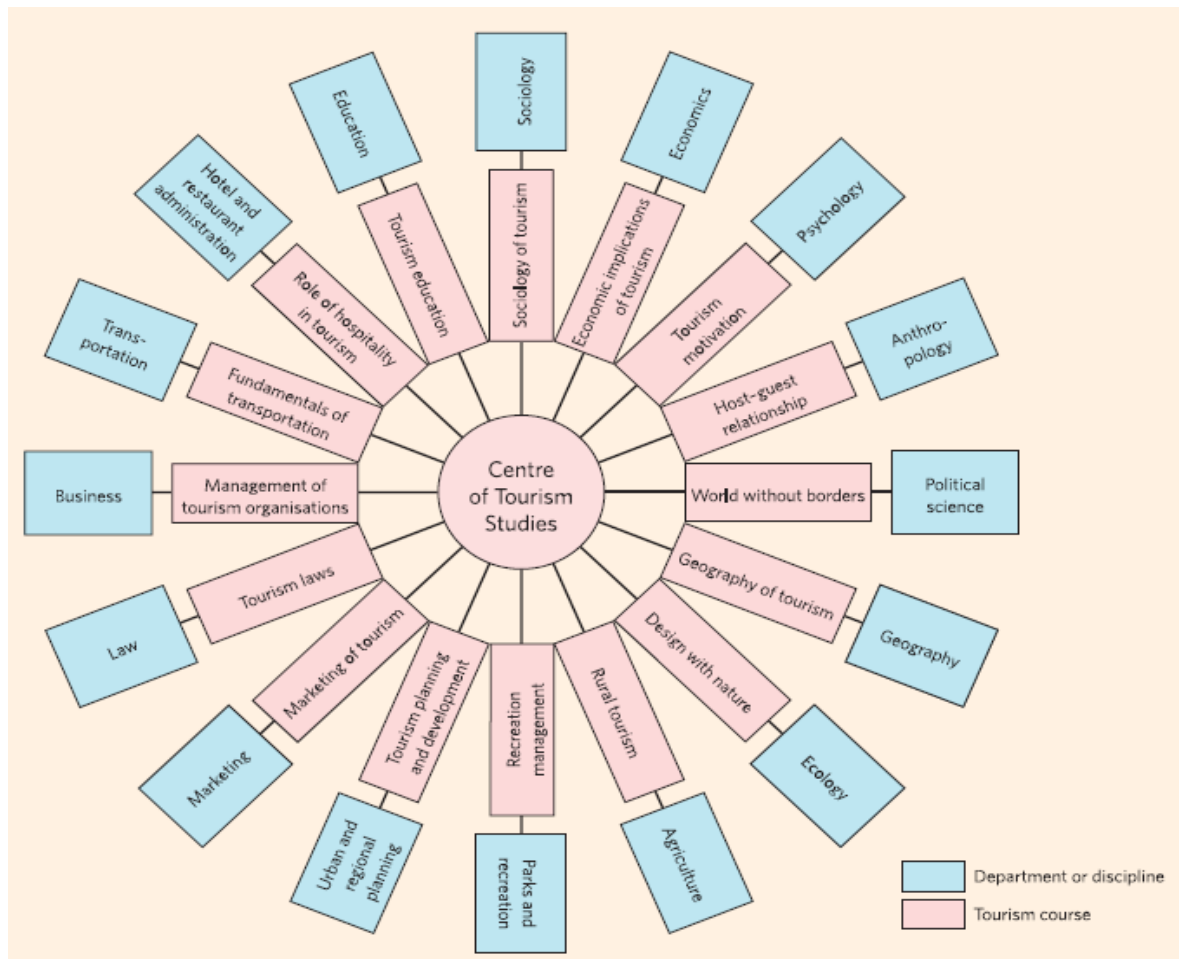
Sometimes the situation in the tourism business can be urgent. Hotel beds have to be sold before the night or within the night. If a hotel bed is without guest in a certain night it has lost its value for that particular night as it is not possible to hold the value for that day and sell it to another day. The same applies to a tour company also. Seasonal packages must be sold before the season arrives. Employers definitely look for employees who would be able to understand and cope with these complexities of the tourism business (Tourism Review 2011).

Hoteliers try to sell the night by the highest possible amount thanks to Yield Management Software, which helps to tell the person at front office how much a room can be sold to maximise the hotel profit. Restaurants also now use reservation software to book seats for customers. Tourism brings foreign currencies to the host country, but recently experts have shown great concern for the environment, culture, high prices of commodities and dissatisfaction among the local population. Many of the world's most visited places have been kept under preservation because of excessive tourist exploitation of natural resources. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia faced tremendous damages through tourism activities, so the government had to take action to save this great reef. Sustainability in tourism destination should be maintained for long-term growth, and this is only possible by increasing the awareness among tourists. Researchers have to bring up facts and figures to officials to help making policy to achieve greater sustainability in tourist destinations. It is education and research which bring new ideas and innovation to give a new shape to tourism industry. Tourism education has made changes in different ways so businesses get profit, customers get satisfaction, new jobs are created, the government gets taxes through

increased sales, other businesses also make profit, so the overall condition of a country improves. (University of Michigan 2011.)

### 3.1 Diversity of tourism study

Tourism study is a branch of social science, which is interesting to study because of its diverse connection to many other study subjects. Sometimes it can be complex to combine all the other branches of study into tourism study. To be highly benefited from tourism studies, education providers should consider all the aspects which are connected to tourism to include in the study curriculum.



GRAPH 4. Study of tourism and choice of discipline and approach (adapted from Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2008)

The graph above clearly shows many different subjects of studies which are connected to tourism studies. Even though it has been a very young subject to study, recently more researchers and academics are getting interested in this study area. Tourism studies need knowledge of many other fields, including psychology, geography, economics, business, law, anthropology, ecology and many more. It is essential for a disciplined approach to help lessen possible sources of misunderstanding for students. (Cooper et al. 2008, 8)

### **3.2 Importance of tourism education**

Tourism is a global activity and there is always demand for skilled professionals in large hotel chains, travel and tours organizations etc. It is often seen that tourism employers are hiring graduates from other disciplines of study, which require employers to train their new staff. This process is time consuming and expensive for employers. Tourism degree students with both practical and business knowledge in the hospitality and tourism industry definitely add value to employers. It is easier for tourism degree students to understand the aim of the employer as they have gained some work and theoretical knowledge in this industry (Tourism Review 2011).

### **3.3 Tourism education around the world**

Today tourism is an important subject to study around the world. Many tourism courses are taught in vocational schools, such as, cooking, housekeeping, restaurant services, and coffee preparation etc. Higher education institutions provide tourism management courses on different levels. Major universities offer Bachelor, Masters, PhD level courses in the USA, the UK and Canada etc. They have now included many fields of studies which are related to tourism. Main tourism service providers are hotels, travel agencies, transportation, man-made or natural attraction management companies, government organizations etc. The organizational structure of a tourism provider can be very complex and large; it requires many fields of expertise to run its day to day activity. In a hotel there are employees who are needed to communicate with the tourist directly e.g. front office executive, and those who may not have to e.g. website developer. In restaurant there is a need for food preparation skills, food and drinks serving skills, managers to manage the

place etc. In the accommodation sector there is a need for accommodation manager, housekeeping, cleaning, laundry etc. and there is also the marketing department and IT (information technology) section. There are management companies e.g Starwoods Hotel and Resorts Worldwide Inc. who run the property through direct or indirect ownership. There are special schools for cooking courses, housekeeping courses, hotel and restaurant management courses, preparing beverage courses are available all around the world. Thus various fields of studies are included in tourism education. (Cooper et al. 2008, 5).

### **3.4 Tourism education in Finland**

Finland's 3.5% of total GDP comes from tourism and a large number of people are employed through the tourism industry. In year 2010 there was a 9% increase which is half a million more tourist arrivals in Finland. (Ministry of Employment and Economy 2011.)

In recent years, tourism has been an important field of study in Finland with schools who have been teaching courses related to tourism. Many young people choose to study tourism related courses as their first choice because it provides tremendous opportunities to find employment around the world. According to the Finnish national board of education the following courses are provided in tourism, catering and domestic services field: Cook, Receptionist hotel services, Waiter- waitress restaurant services, Housekeeper household service, Site facilities operative cleaning services, Tourism activities organizer tourism services, Travel counsellor tourism sales and information services. (Finnish National Board of Education 2011.)

#### **3.4.1 Internationalisation of higher education in Finland**

It was an ambitious plan by the Finnish government to make Finland's higher education internationalized and globally competitive. According to the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009–2015 the five primary aims are: A genuinely international higher education community, increasing the quality and attractiveness of higher education institutions, export of expertise, supporting a multicultural society, promoting global responsibilities. (Ministry of Education, Finland 2011).



### **3.4.2 Finnish higher education in tourism**

The primary provider for tourism education in Finland is The Finnish University Network of Tourism Studies (FUNTS). Due to the multidisciplinary nature of tourism, the network was initiated in 1995. With seventeen universities involved in the network, staff can be drawn from member institutions, depending on their area of expertise, to ensure students are provided with a well-rounded program. (Lee, Reid & Arcodia 2011.)

University of applied sciences were introduced as vocational institutions, during that time only few of them used to teach tourism. When the polytechnic system was introduced in the early 1990s, there were changes in program. The two year diploma was changed to a three and a half to four year degree. One of the advices from the Ministry of Education was for university of applied sciences to phase tourism programs into their curriculum, therefore some tourism programs commenced as late as 1998. Although both universities and university of applied sciences are higher educational institutions, universities have a strong research focus by offering opportunities for post-graduate studies, in contrast, universities of applied sciences emphasis on incorporating practical components into their programs. A number of universities of applied sciences however, are emphasising to be more actively involved in applied research (Lee, Reid & Arcodia 2011.).

Some educational institutions have been teaching tourism for a long time. Many of them have already received international recognition for quality education courses. Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (UAS) is one of them, which had celebrated its forty years of Hospitality management education on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2009. Currently it has Bachelor Degree programmes in English and Finnish. The newly introduced Master's Degree programme in Hospitality Management taught in English, has been able to attract students and working professionals (Haaga-Helia UAS 2011). Presently most of the Polytechnics in Finland provide hospitality education in Finnish, Swedish and English on a Bachelor's level. Laurea UAS and Haaga-Helia UAS has Master's Degree Programmes in Tourism Management in Finnish also. (Online application to Polytechnics in Finland 2012.)

Lapland institute of Tourism research and Education is one of the prominent steps to develop tourism education in Finland. It consists of Lapland University: Department of tourism and business, Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences: School of tourism an

hospitality management and Lapland tourism college. It was founded to meet the growing needs for tourism research and development; therefore, to strengthen research and education on tourism, to modernize, to internationalize and diversify. It has been proved as a strong developer of the industry and a supporter of the regional and national tourism strategies. (Lapland institute of tourism research 2011.)

### **3.4.3 Employment issues of foreign students**

Communication skills are very important in any tourism business. To be employed in the tourism business it is essential to have a good command of communication skills. One of the characteristics of service is “Inseparability of production and consumption” (Athens University of Economics and Business 2012). So there is an involvement of both service provider and service user. To make the moment of truth memorable it is expected service from the provider to have good enough communication skills.

In recent years there has been a large flow of foreign students in Finland because of the internationalisation of higher education. Presently there are 15,700 international students are enrolled in Finnish higher education institutions. The number is equally divided between Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. However, this number represents only 4 per cent of students studying in higher education institutions nationwide. Unfortunately, 70 percent of non-Finnish students are leaving the country after completing their study. One of the main reasons is that they could not find a suitable job after their graduation. The main obstacle has been proved as language barrier for foreign students. (Houston 2011.)

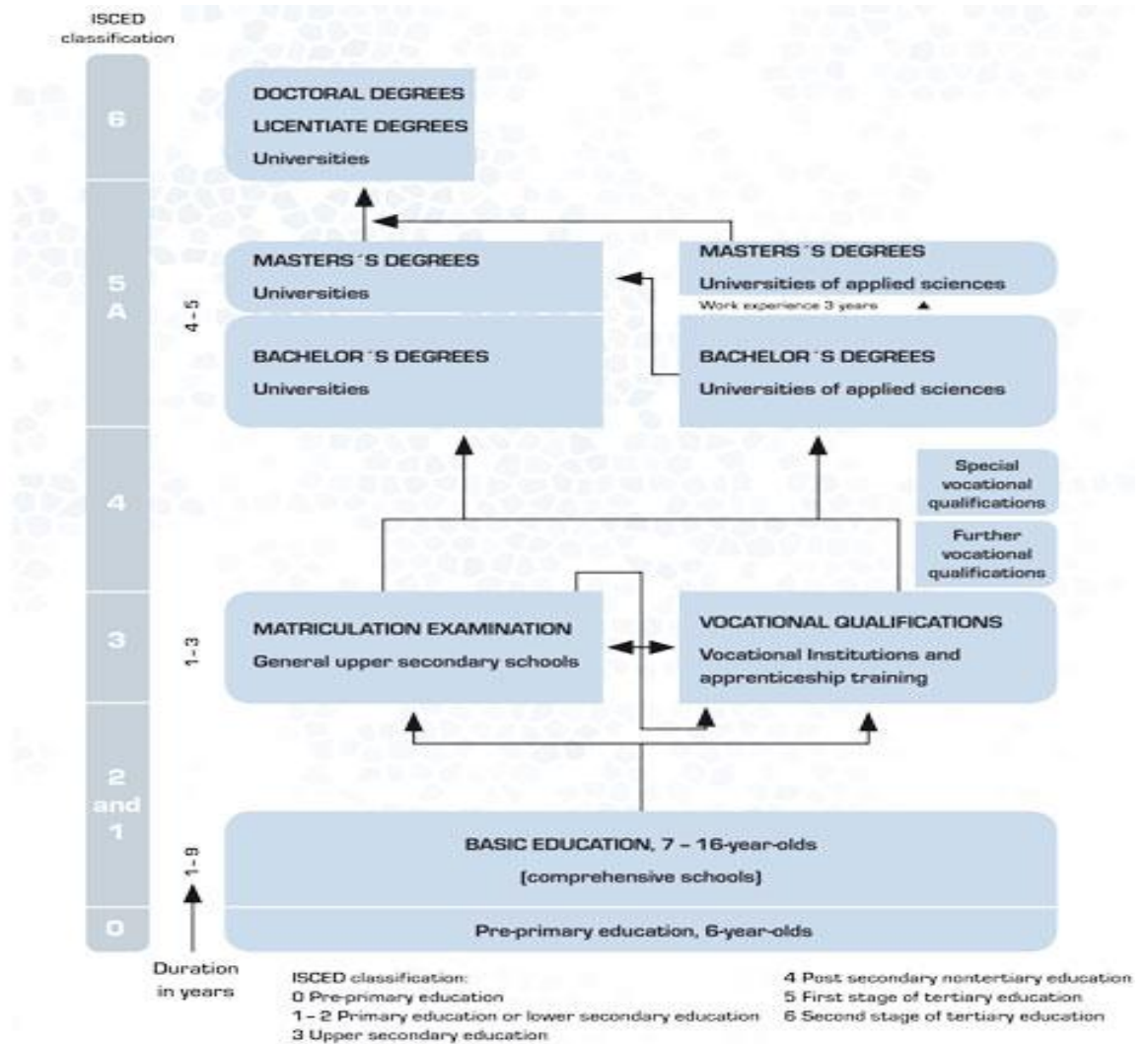
But one of the main objectives of internationalization of higher education is to attract foreign skilled people to be part of the Finnish labour market. Finland would get benefited when these foreign students join the workforce after completing their study. Finland is also experiencing labour shortage like other western economies, because of the low birth rate. To maintain growth there is a need of foreign skills and international thinkers. Unfortunately a high quality Finnish degree is not enough to compete on the Finnish job market unless one does not speak fluent Finnish. The only way to overcome the barrier is to include more Finnish and Swedish language courses in the curriculum instead of other language studies. (Länsiluoto 2012.)

The Lapland and Helsinki regions are the most tourism job generating regions in Finland because of their unique location in Finland. Lapland offers seasonal tourism activity in contrast to Helsinki which offers all-the-year round tourism activity. By exploring the job website by Ministry of Labour ([www.mol.fi](http://www.mol.fi)) it is profound that the Helsinki area and Lapland area had more tourism jobs than any other region in Finland. One of the requirements for language skills were fluency in Finnish and English language skills, and knowledge of other languages is seen as beneficial. But bilingual cities like Jakobstad/Pietarsaari or Porvoo stressed Swedish language skill more with good command of Finnish. There were actually very few tourism jobs were available to these places than bigger cities. (Ministry of Labour 2009-2012.)

### **3.5 Finnish Universities of applied sciences**

Finland's higher education consists of two complementary sectors: Polytechnics (University of Applied Sciences) and Universities. Universities offer more theoretically based education to continue scientific research and instruction for post graduate education based on it. The aim of a University of Applied Science is to provide professionally oriented higher education to meet the demand of the labour market. University of applied sciences train professionals according to market needs and conduct research and development (R&D) to support instruction and promote regional development. The University of Applied Sciences system is comparatively new in higher education system. In 1991-92 the first University of Applied Sciences were started on trial basis. In 1996 the first University of Applied Sciences were made permanent. All University of Applied Sciences were working on a permanent basis by 2000. (Finnish National Board of Education 2011.)

Currently Universities of Applied Sciences offer education in the following fields: Humanities and Education, Culture, Social sciences, business and administration, Natural resources and the environment, Technology, communication and transport, Natural sciences, Social services, health and sport and Tourism, catering and domestic services.



GRAPH 5. The Finnish education system (adapted from the Ministry of Education 2011)

A degree from a University of Applied Sciences generally consists of 210-240 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credit. It is equivalent to 3.5-4 years of full time study. The minimum requirements for entry into a University of Applied Science, are a certificate from an upper secondary school or the matriculation certificate, a vocational qualification or corresponding foreign studies. Each student follows a personal study plan, which facilitates student guidance and the monitoring of progress in studies. (Finnish National Board of Education 2011.)

During January-February students apply to the University of Applied Sciences through the joint application system electronically. Each UAS has the right to determine the principles of student admission independently. The admission is based on previous study record,

work experience and the result from the entrance test. (Online application to Polytechnics in Finland 2012)

A total number of 139,900 students attended University of applied sciences in different degree programmes in autumn 2011, leading to a degree qualification education. This has been a 0.7 percent increase from the previous year 2010. The number of new students was 38,800, which is less than 1.6 percent compared to the last year at the same time. The largest number of students are pursuing their studies in the field of technology, transport and welfare, health and physical exercises. (Statistics Finland 2012)

Currently Universities of Applied Sciences offer following studies in English: Bachelor's degree programme, Master's degree programme, Exchange studies and Vocational teacher education. University of applied sciences do not charge tuition fees for degree studies. Some institution charge tuition fees from non-EU citizens in some specific Master degree programmes. (Ministry of Education, 2011.)

### **3.5.1 Tourism education in Universities of Applied Sciences**

In Finland there are seven Universities of Applied Sciences which offer English study programmes in Tourism, catering and domestic services field. The following Bachelor's degree programmes are offered in tourism studies.

Central Ostrobothnia UAS offers Degree programme in Tourism. Haaga Helia UAS offers courses in Degree programme in Experience and wellness management, Degree programme in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management and Degree programme in Tourism. JAMK UAS offers courses in Degree Programme in Facility Management. Laurea UAS offers Degree Programme in Facility Management and Degree Programme in Tourism. Rovaniemi UAS offers Degree Programme in Tourism. Saima UAS offers Degree Programme in Tourism. Tampere UAS offers Degree Programme in Tourism and Vaasa UAS offers Degree Programme in Tourism. (Online application to Polytechnics in Finland 2012)

TABLE 1. Number of study places in tourism degree programmes in English (adapted from admission office of each UAS)

<b>Name of UAS</b>	<b>Name of Degree programme</b>	<b>Student intake 2011</b>	<b>Student intake 2010</b>
COU	Tourism	40	40
Haaga Helia UAS	Experience and wellness management	20	18
	Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management	50	20
	Tourism	40	20
JAMK UAS	Facility management	40	40
Laurea UAS	Facility management	30	30
	Tourism	40	40
Rovaniemi UAS	Tourism	20	20
Saimaa UAS	Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management	20	20
Tampere UAS	Tourism	20	20
Vaasa UAS	Tourism	22	22

### 3.5.2 Ranking of Universities of Applied Sciences

There are not many official measurements available which could make a ranking of the Universities of Applied Sciences. It could be an easy way to improve the competitiveness among the University of Applied Sciences.

In March 2011, a survey result among 25 universities of applied sciences, which categorized the institutions in order of merit. There were ten categories which were attractiveness, the versatility of sources of funding, the price of the degree, innovation, internationality, students' satisfaction, study progress, reaching the target amount of degree qualification, graduate employment and positive regional influences. A scale of 4-10 was used to measure the criteria. Kajaani University of Applied Sciences ranked the best

institution among twenty-five University of Applied Sciences with 77.25 points, Haaga-helia UAS stood second with 76.50 points and JAMK UAS stood third with 74.75 points. Central Ostrobothnia UAS gained fifth position with 71.25 point. Central Ostrobothnia UAS was awarded highest point for students' satisfaction. The other two highest point achieving criteria were the versatility of sources of funding and the price of the degree. Unfortunately, the two lowest point achieving criteria were study progress 5+ and graduate employment 5-. (Magazine Talouselämä 2011)

This survey clearly indicates the strength and the weakness of COU in the mentioned categories, but the survey does not necessarily provide a reliable indication of performance by the Universities of Applied Sciences. However, it would be an opportunity for COU to realize the weakness to improve the shortage of efficiencies in some fields.

### **3.6 Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences**

Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences (COU) has become a significant place for providing tourism higher education in Finland. It could be considered as one of the best place for bringing up future tourism professionals as it has the largest student intake in the tourism field comparing with other Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland.

Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences (COU) was founded in 1991 and received its permanent position in 1995. The university will change its name to Centria University of Applied Sciences with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012. Its excellent location in west of Finland gave it a more strategic position in northern Europe. It has been providing education in multi-disciplinary areas of study. It has striven to achieve internationality to become a lively place of study. Its degree programmes are taught in three campuses situated in three different cities, Kokkola, Pietarsaari and Ylivieska. Kokkola and Pietarsaari have an old tradition and strategic and competitive position for being bilingual cities in Finland. Ylivieska is known as a center for trade and often called as a service town, situated in the river valley on the Ostrobothnian plain. COU has been offering education, continued research and development to improve its surrounding region and in overall Finland. Regional well-being, continuous learning and continuous quality

developments are the core values of COU. (Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)

Central University of Applied Sciences is offering education in Chemical Engineering, Information Technology, Business management, Nursing, Music and Performing Arts. There are around 3300 students in six fields and 21 degree programmes in COU. In the annual intake 622 students are admitted for studying. Most courses are taught in the Finnish language but there are six international degree programmes which are entirely taught in English. The six programmes are: the Degree Programme in Business Management, Chemistry and Technology, Industrial Management, Information Technology, Nursing and Tourism. (Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)

### **3.6.1 The Degree Programme in Tourism in COU**

The Degree programme in Tourism in Pietarsaari campus consists of 210 ECTS (European credit transfer system) credits. This programme provides students broad knowledge of the tourism industry, sufficient knowledge of business management skills and practical knowledge of working in the industry. This programme encourages students to become a pioneer in sales, planning and development positions in tourism industry as well as to become an entrepreneur in the region. Students are expected to look for work in travel agencies, in the passenger traffic industry, accommodation industry and many other service industries in Finland and abroad. The ECTS credits are divided into these study levels. Each year it is expected from a student to complete at least ECTS 60 credits. The programme can be completed in 3.5 years to 4.5 years of time. The aim is that students have the necessary skills in both Finnish, Swedish and English language and other communication skill to succeed in their future career in the tourism industry. After completing 210 ECTS credits students graduate as a Bachelor's of Hospitality Management. (Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)



TABLE 2. Study credits in year 2009-2010 (adapted from Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)

Basic studies	30 credits
Professional studies	120 credits
Elective studies	15 credits
Thesis	15 credits
Work placement	30 credits
<b>Total</b>	<b>210 credits</b>

TABLE 3. Study credits in year 2011-2012 (adapted from Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)

Basic studies	42 credits
Professional studies	108 credits
Elective studies	15 credits
Thesis	15 credits
Work placement	30 credits
<b>Total</b>	<b>210 credits</b>

The tables above show the changes made during the last academic year. There have been changes in the study curriculum of tourism degree programme recently. The number of credits gained from the basic studies has been increased to 42 from 30 credits from the starting new academic year 2011-2012. Professional studies have been reduced to 108 credits from 120 credits. Elective studies, thesis and work placement remain as it was before.

### **3.6.2 International atmosphere in the Degree Programme in Tourism**

The Degree Programme in Tourism in COU has been able to attract students from different parts of the world. The international Degree Programme started in the academic year of 2008-2009. During that academic period a total of 40 students started their education in this programme. Currently there are more than 22 nationalities represented by students in the Degree Programme in Tourism, which is another competitive advantage for marketing of this degree programme. Students are from Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Nigeria, Kenya, the USA, Germany, Switzerland, Vietnam, Ghana, Afghanistan, Cameroon, Spain, Mexico, China, Norway, Romania etc. Diversity of student cultural background has made the Degree Programme in Tourism a unique opportunity for students to learn how to work in an international atmosphere. Every year some international exchange students also join the Degree Programme in Tourism for one semester or two, which improves the multicultural learning environment on campus. (Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)

### **3.6.3 Foreign language learning opportunities**

In COU, there is a huge opportunity to learn new languages. Finnish students have to learn the other official language. For foreign students it is compulsory to take part in Finnish for foreigners 1, 2, and Swedish for foreigners 1, 2. There are also possibilities to learn Spanish, Russian, Basics of French, Basics of German, Greek, Italian, Chinese, etc. This is a wonderful opportunity for students to be masters in other languages except for their mother tongue and another official language. (Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)

TABLE 4. Language studies in Degree Programme in Tourism

<b>Language course</b>	<b>Required study credits</b>	<b>Study period</b>
Finnish for Foreigners 1	3 credits	1 <sup>st</sup> year
Finnish for foreigners 2	3 credits	2 <sup>nd</sup> year
Swedish for foreigners 1	3 credits	1 <sup>st</sup> year
Swedish for foreigners 2	3 credits	2 <sup>nd</sup> year
Spanish/German/Russian/French/Italian/Chinese Greek/Swedish for foreigner 3/Finnish for foreigners 3	12 credits	3. 5 years
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 credits</b>	<b>In 3.5 years</b>

The above table shows the language allocation of language learning opportunities by academic year. Local students and foreign students have the same language requirements. Finnish for foreigners 1 and Finnish for foreigners 2 are both 3 credit courses which are compulsory for international students. There were also Swedish for foreigners 1 during the first year of study, and Swedish for foreigners 2 in the second year of study. There was total of 12 credits of compulsory studies of Finnish and Swedish language studies during the first and second year of study for the students in the academic year 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. There are still compulsory studies, another 12 credit of language studies. Students could choose French, Russian, German, Geek, Chinese, Italian, Spanish etc. Starting from the academic year of 2011-1012, there is a possibility to include Finnish for foreigners 3 and Swedish for foreigners 3 courses as language study for students. Students are needed to complete another 12 credits of languages studies by studying other languages. (Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences 2011.)

## **4 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION**

This aim of this section is to introduce the reader to the research methodology used in this research. Firstly, it describes research, types of research methods, then validity and reliability of the research, and finally the data collection and research design procedure will be discussed.

Research is a human activity which investigates something that broadens human knowledge. Discovery, interpretation and the development of methods and systems for the advancement of human knowledge on a variety of scientific matters, are the primary purposes of research. Sometimes research can also be used to describe a collection of information about a particular subject. It is very important to choose a research method on the basis of what the researcher wants to know. There are research questions which can be best answered by using quantitative methods. For example: the employment rate of students after graduation, which requires numerical answers to be best understood by readers. Quantitative research is best suited to test a hypothesis, for example to know whether a student's high employment opportunity depends on good academic results. A hypothesis is an uncertain cause of some fact which can be tested for further study. (Glenn 2010, 10)

### **4.1 Quantitative research**

In quantitative research, it is required to collect data from someone or something. Data is collected from the people or the things which are known as units or cases. The data collected from these units is known as variables. Variables differ from unit to unit. Quantitative methods will fail when the researcher wants to explore problem in depth, but rather it is good at providing numbers which helps to make decisions based on the results. To understand any problem in depth one has to take a qualitative approach. If it is necessary to look at both breadth and depth, it is wise to use mixed methods design in which both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used. A well designed quantitative research can provide an explanation to why it happens, not only what happens. Even though the quantitative method uses numerical data, it does not have to be naturally

available in quantitative form. Through measurement instruments non-quantitative phenomena can be turned into quantitative data (Glenn 2010, 95.)

#### **4.1.1 The quantitative research process**

A questionnaire consists of questions printed on paper or in an electronic format on the Internet. A similar questionnaire is used for a particular research to interview the chosen sample group for responses. There are two types of survey formats as some surveys can be filled up by the interviewer, whereas the other can be filled up by the respondents. In the first one the interviewer has a direct contact with the respondents as the interviewer reads out the questions face-to-face or over the telephone. The interviewer may record the interview, fill in the answer later, or fill it in as the interviewee responds. In the second one, respondents receive questionnaires in printed versions or in electronic version. The respondents read the questions and write answers on the questionnaire or on the screen. Questionnaire-based surveys are required when quantified information is required concerning the related population. It helps to reveal certain behaviour or attitude by the target group towards certain things. (Veal 2011, 126-127.)

Survey research is probably the most popular research design in the social sciences. It is flexible to its design and can be appeared in different forms. Surveys are the collection of data using standard questionnaire forms administered by telephone or face to face, by postal pencil-and-paper questionnaires. Web based surveys or email form surveys are increasingly used today. Surveys are quick but designing a survey research is not that simple. (Muijs 2004, 10.)

#### **4.1.2 E-surveys**

E-surveys or electronic or online surveys are conducted using the Internet. Printed paper based surveys have proven costly and time consuming. Often respondents might find it uncomfortable also to send it back to the interviewer. The response rate, costs and speed have been the major drawback of paper-based surveys. Other types of surveys like telephone surveys also have major drawbacks. Nowadays increasing use of e-surveys can be noticed by the firms who want to save costs and time. Low cost and the fast speed are

the main advantages of e-surveys for researchers. As it is possible to design a fully electronic version questionnaire it is proved to be very user friendly. In electronic surveys it is easy to fill in the answers by choosing the right alternatives. One of the main disadvantages of this type of survey is that it is confined to those who have access to the Internet. Too many e-surveys may reduce the interest of the respondents, which may decrease the response rate of a survey. (Veal 2011, 273-274.)

## **4.2 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research can be described as the collection and analysis of qualitative information to find out why things are happening and not how things are happening. It is concerned about qualitative information rather than numerical data. There are often situations when quantified research is not necessary or not possible. Where quantitative research allows the researcher to ask questions about what is in the researcher's mind, the qualitative research method allows people to speak about a certain situation without any framework of questionnaire. So it is possible to know a lot more about products or services (Veal 2011, 125-126).

The aim for a researcher who uses a qualitative research method is to gather in-depth information of some matters and describe the reasons that cause that matter to happen. Qualitative research was used in the beginning of social studies. Much of its popularity was reduced due to quantitative research but started to be regained again in the 1970's. It was only limited to a few fields of social science like anthropology or sociology. It started to become popular as many other fields of social sciences, such as education studies, social work studies, women studies, disability studies, information studies, management studies, nursing services studies, human service studies, psychology, communication studies and others started to use qualitative research. (Glenn 2010, 95.)

In qualitative research sampling is purposive not random. The role of the researcher is important, so the researcher must clear this in the research process. Researchers must also keep a consistency in themes in a reliable way. Qualitative research is exploratory which means that it generates a hypothesis; on the other hand quantitative methods test the hypothesis. Qualitative data may help to explain quantitative results or can be used to

generate additional variables to include in an analysis. Qualitative research is also very effective in policy evaluation. (Glenn 2010, 96.)

#### **4.2.1 The qualitative research process**

Qualitative research methods usually demand more flexible ways during the research design. It has often been seen that quantitative research is likely to be sequential in character. Much qualitative research involves a more flexible relationship between the elements of the research, which is named as recursive. Qualitative research starts with a hypothesis plan which advances as the research evolves, data is collected and analysed which leads to writing of the results. Writing is an on-going process which is not separated from the others. It has to be done as the analysis and data collection step is in process. (Veal 2011, 231.)

There are different ways of collecting data for qualitative research, including: in-depth interviews; group interviews or focus groups; participant observation; textual analysis; biographical methods; and ethnography. The qualitative method used to write this report based on a group interview. Interviewing groups of people together has become more popular in nowadays. Here the interviewer works as a facilitator of a discussion rather than an interviewer as such, which brings a more lively discussion. The process is quite the same as an in-depth interview, but the only difference here is that subjects interact with each other as well as with the researcher. (Veal 2012, 237-239.)

#### **4.2.2 Method of group interview**

Usually five to twelve participants could make a group for an interview. Group interviewees are available for market researcher for this sort of exercise, or they may be chosen because they are members of a particular group of interest to the research, for example, students in a particular degree programme or visitors in an attraction. It is recommended to record the interview with permission from the group. The tape would be useful to produce as a summary later on. The interview is carried out in an informal way but still the interviewer has the responsibility of guiding the discussion and ensuring all the topics are covered during the interview. The interview should not be dominated by one or

two vociferous members of the group, and everybody in the group should have their say. This type of interview is useful when the particular group is so small in number that it is not possible to do a survey. Sometimes discussion and close interaction brings out many interesting facts about a topic. If it is not possible to do an in-depth interview, rather interviewees want to give their views as a group. (Veal 2011, 245-247.)

### **4.3 Validity and reliability**

Research becomes successful when there is a certain extent of legitimacy of the outcomes of the research. The methods used in the research must gain confidence. Future users of the research must be satisfied with the results, which led to truthful outcomes. In this section the validity and reliability of the research is discussed to inform the reader about the extent of validity and reliability of the research that has been conducted. Validity of research is measured from at least two contexts: during the research design internal and external validity, and in measurement the validity of the measurement. (Jha 2008, 101.) Validity is one of the most important aspects of the design of any measurement instrument in educational research. The results will be meaningless if we are not able to measure what we are declaring to measure. (Muijs 2004, 76.)

This research report is based on a survey which was carried out through the Internet as an e-survey, and a group interview with the exchange students. Questions were designed and sent by the author through the Internet and students had completed and send the form through the Internet. Confusion may arise concerning the questions from the respondents' perspective. The questions were not fully validated to be able to bring the data required to complete the research. The scale used to measure the satisfaction level from the students' perspective does not necessarily produce an exact level of satisfaction in their mind. Less than one-fourth of the students have taken part in this research, so the outcome of the research cannot be considered as absolute truth. Only a small part of the students' views are presented in this research report.

Reliability is the extent to which the result of the research would be same if it was to be carried out at a later date or with a different sample group. In social sciences, researchers deal with human behaviour, choice, emotion etc. These give different data in different situations. Due to varying social and physical environments identical question asked to



people from different location within a country's border may produce different results. The group interview was carried out in November 2011, and the e-survey was carried out in March 2012. Time will pass and people's minds will also change. It is very true that the research result might be different if it was to be carried out at a later time with a different group of students. The reader must consider these factors during the use of the findings of the research report. People's minds may change due to social and physical environmental effects. In the future, students in COU might have different opinions in response to the questions asked in the research. (Veal 2011, 46-47).

What is needed to consider during reading the report, is that the exchange student satisfaction report is prepared based on feedback from exchange students, which does not necessarily provide a view of quality of teaching in this university. Those who are full-time students may provide better information about the quality of study. This report is based on information given by four interviewees only. Since those students came from different countries they will have different views of their own study experiences, and one semester is not enough to get the whole picture of the COU's study environment. It is recommended that in order to understand the true situation, it is needed to continue with this type of interview. This should continue for several years as there is only a few exchange students who come here every semester.

#### **4.4 Research design and data collection**

There were two research methods used to complete the research. A group interview to the exchange students, and an e-survey to the full-time students. The reason for choosing the qualitative research method is that there were only four exchange students during this semester and it was not sensible to conduct a quantitative research. Through qualitative research it would be a more easy and flexible way to understand their feelings and thinking about their study experience in Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences (COU). This interview took place in two of the interviewees' place of residence, where two other interviewees came to attend the interview. The interview took around forty-five minutes. Digital audio recorder was used to record the interview with the permission of the interviewees. The interview was a semi-structured interview with some important themes to cover about the study experience in COU. This report is a first attempt of its kind to get

feedback from exchange students to serve them better in the future, which will definitely improve the competitiveness of COU.

The e-survey was an important tool to reach all the students. Due to lack of funding it was not possible to print out many questionnaires and send to every student. It would take a long time to get responses and it would have required the researcher to manually enter the results in the SPSS programme for data analysis. The author chose to use e-survey to overcome those barriers. As all the students had access to internet, it was the easiest way to reach the students. An e-survey was created using Google docs automated software. The e-survey was sent through the portal email system to all the students once. In one week time there were a total of 30 responses among 194 enrolled students. The use of the e-survey was proven to be the most convenient, fast and flexible method for the research process.

## **5 RESULTS**

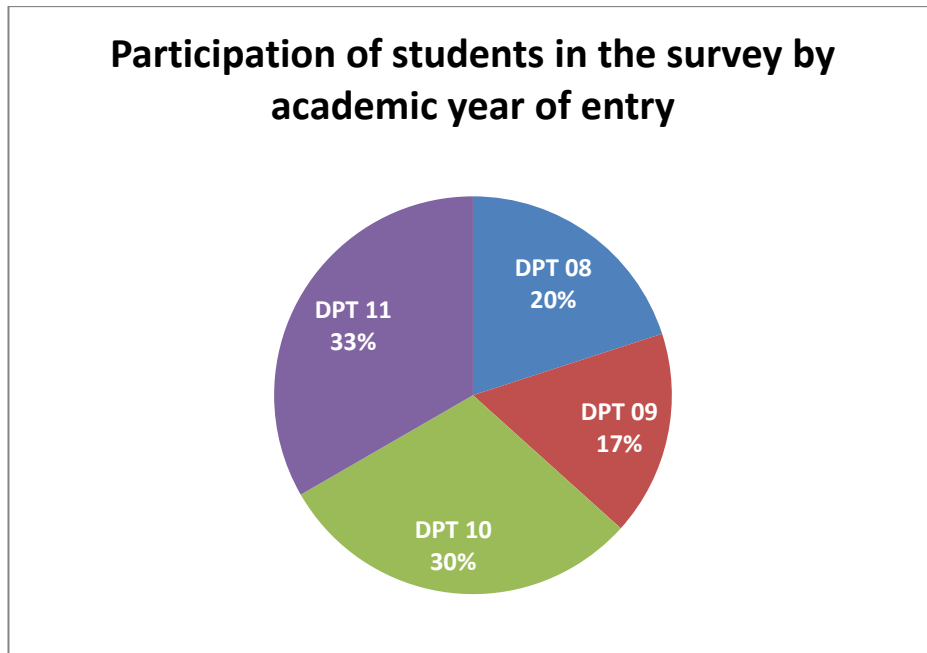
The aim of this chapter is to present the results from the research. It is expected that the results will eventually help to accomplish the goal of the research. For the qualitative research part, a written report presents the findings from the group interview with the exchange students. The results are presented in such a way that they would profile the students; describe their preferences, satisfaction level on certain matter and express their opinions on certain issues. The following sub-chapters will give the reader a clear understanding of the research results.

### **5.1 Findings from the quantitative research**

The results from the quantitative research are presented with the help of graphs and tables. It is necessary to gather information and express it with the help of numbers. The following findings are concerned with students' profile and their opinions in numeric values.

#### **5.1.1 Year groups by academic year of entry**

Presently in COU there are students from four academic year groups starting from 2008 to 2011. The perceived value of the tourism education would be different to students from different academic year groups. It was important that students from all academic year groups took part in the survey, which would reflect the true situation. If only some students with a similar background had participated in the survey, it would eventually have resulted in a biased research report. In this survey, students from four academic year groups had participated in a balanced way which was a good thing for the research. Students who started their studies in the Degree Programme in Tourism in the academic years 2010-2011(DPT10) and 2011-2012(DPT11) have shown a higher motivation to take part in the survey. The graph below shows the response rate by academic year group. The biggest group of respondents are from DPT 11, which is 33% (11). The second largest group of participants was DPT 10, which is 30% (9). The lowest response rate came from DPT 09, which is only 17% (5).



GRAPH 6. Students background by academic year group

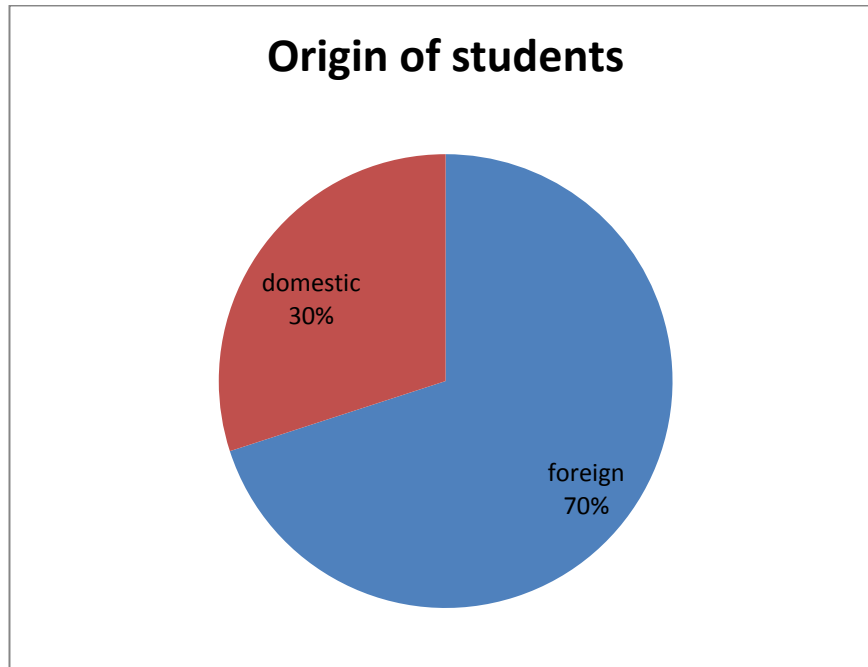
TABLE 5. Number of student who took part in the survey by academic year group

Academic year	Number of students
DPT 08	6
DPT 09	5
DPT 10	9
DPT 11	10

### 5.1.2 Origin of students

The origin of students is also one important background information to consider before evaluating the results of the research. Different backgrounds of students could influence the level of expectation during the studies in COU. The result of different levels of expectation varied in level of satisfaction in the students' mind. In the Degree Programme in Tourism in COU the majority of students are from abroad. A large number of foreign students took part in the research. In different cultures the method of communication, delivery of lessons, teaching methods and the assessment of students' performance etc.

would be different than in Finland or in COU. Students might have different expectations on these things which could show different levels of satisfaction.



GRAPH 7. Students' background by Origins

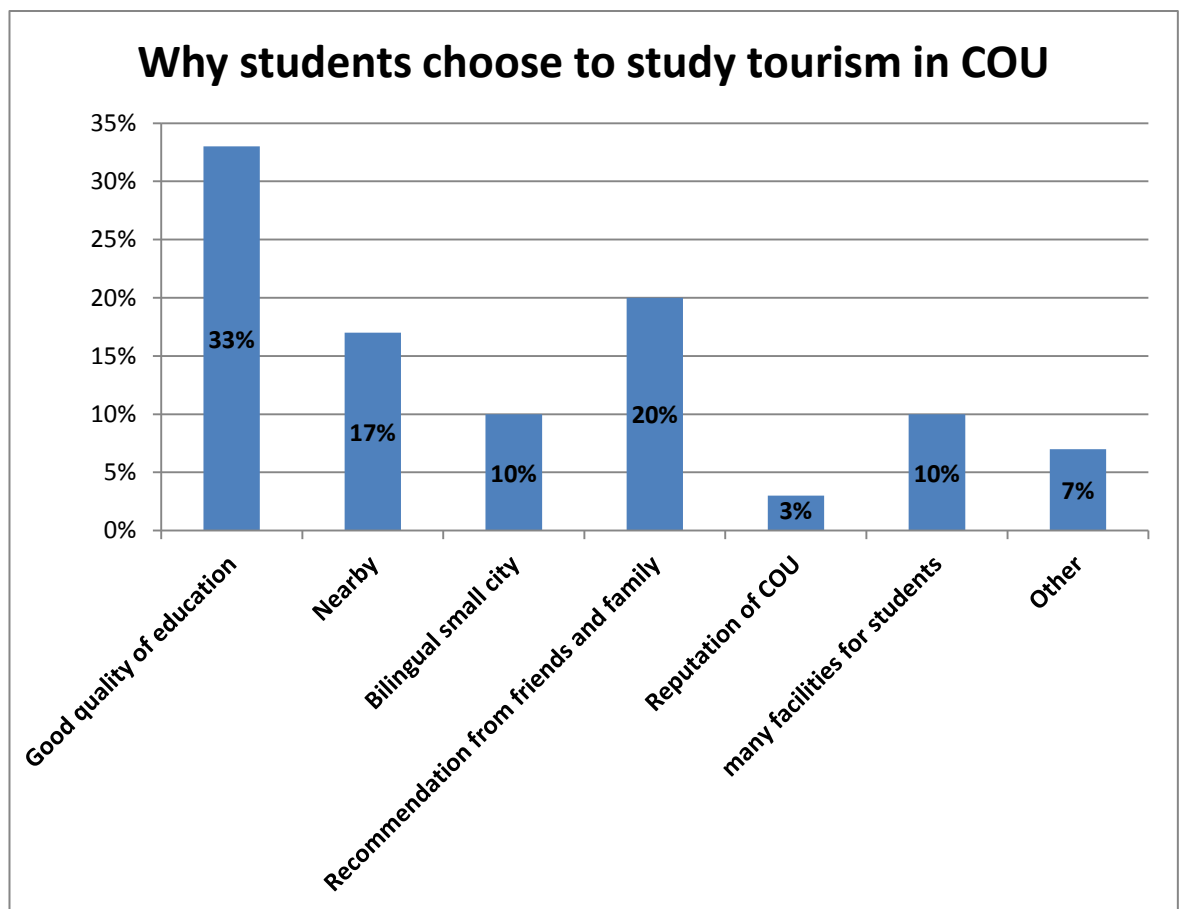
TABLE 6. Number of students by Origin

Origin of Students	Number of student	Percentage
Foreign	21	70%
domestic	9	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

The students were divided into two categories on the basis of their origin. Tourism is a new study programme in COU, and the majority of students are of foreign origin. There were 70% (21) students of foreign origin who took part in the e-survey, and 30% (9) were Finnish student.

### 5.1.3 Motivations for studying tourism in COU

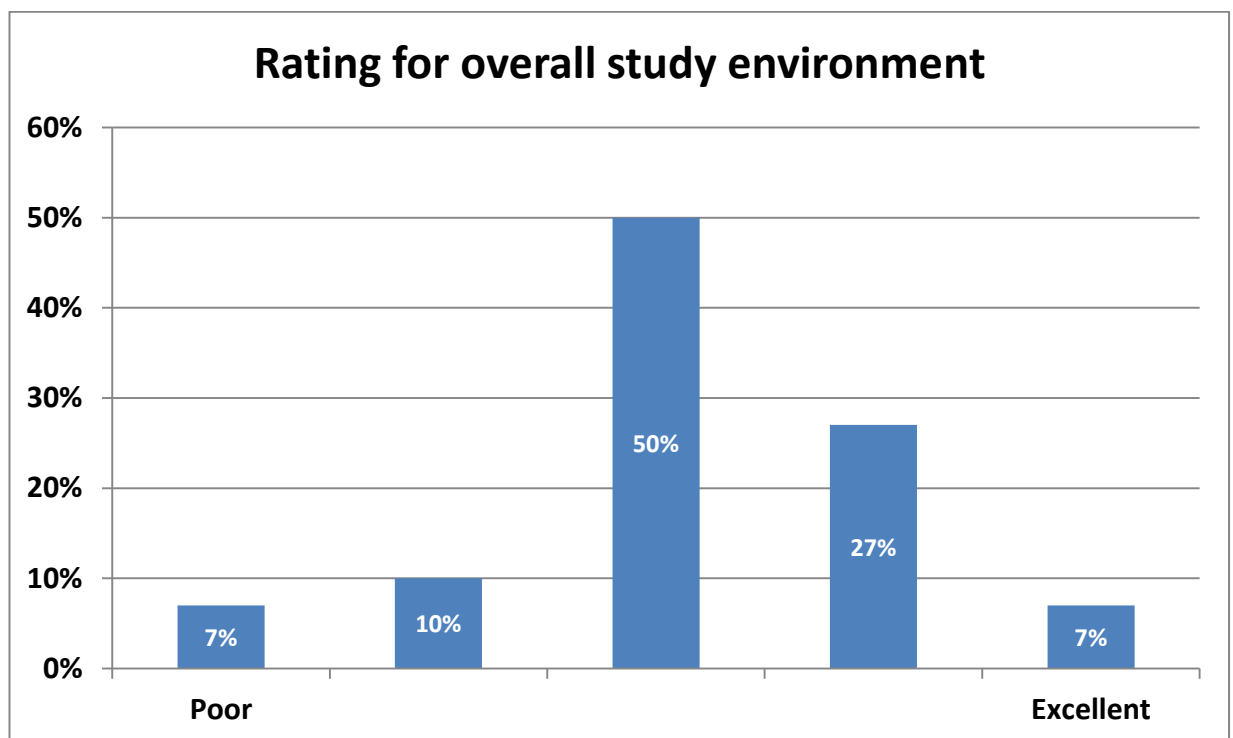
It is important to know the motive for students to come to study at COU. Tourism degree studies are provided in larger cities like Helsinki, Tampere and in the very nearby Vaasa city. It would be an easy way to know what motivates students to join the Degree Programme in Tourism. COU is widely known as a quality education provider. The biggest number of students chose to study tourism at COU because they think that the education provided is very good. The second largest group chose to study at COU because they were influenced by their family members or their friends. This also shows that many of the previous students or persons know about the Degree Programme in Tourism and that it holds a high value of getting education here and they actually recommend this study programme to others. A small percentage of students chose to study at COU because it was nearby their home.



GRAPH 8. Reasons for choosing to study at COU

#### 5.1.4 Rating for overall study environment

It might be difficult for the students to assess all the elements when rating the study environment. Failure to provide some services or one service may make the students disappointed with the whole study experience at COU to some extent. Managing the expectation of students on the education services is very important for COU in order have satisfied students. Students should be able to realize what they are supposed to expect from COU, which will ultimately make them satisfied if the promises are kept or something better has been done than the promised services.



GRAPH 9. Rating for overall study environment

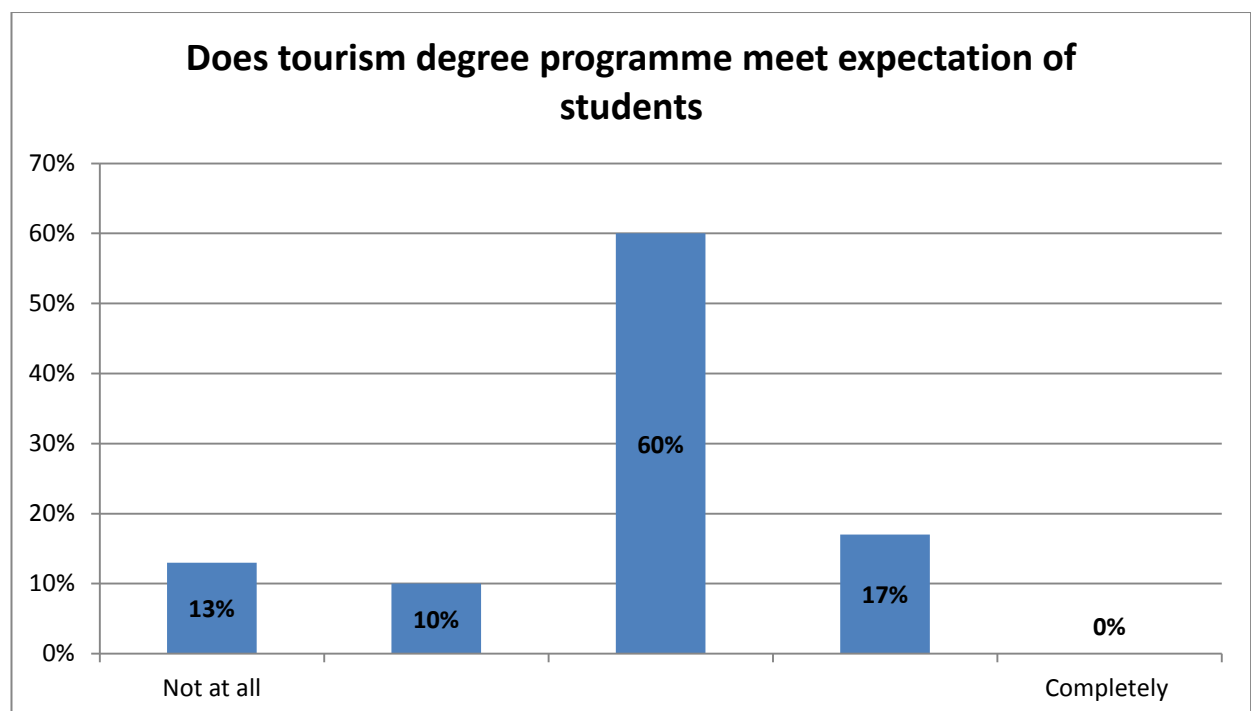
The above column graph shows the ratings for the study environment by the students in percentage. The horizontal axis shows the performance criteria starting from poor to excellent with a scale 1-5. Students placed their rating according to their own perception about their study experience.

In the Degree Programme in Tourism half of the students rated the overall study environment as in between of Excellent and Poor. It is surprising that the same number of students consider the study environment as both Excellent and poor. It is understandable

that the majority of the students consider the overall study environment of the Degree Programme in Tourism in COU to more than good. Rating regarding the overall study environment is connected to everything, including, teaching staff, administration staff, building, library facilities, computer facilities, information about internship etc. The Degree Programme in Tourism has new premise from January 2012. As the research was carried out at the beginning of year 2012 it is assumable that students' ratings for the overall study environment are based on the previous campus facilities.

### 5.1.5 Meeting the expectations of students

Before coming to study to COU students must have some expectation on the level of services they would receive from COU. It is something very crucial to manage the service expectation. Students should be informed what they are supposed to expect from the University of Applied Sciences so the number of dissatisfaction rate will be low.



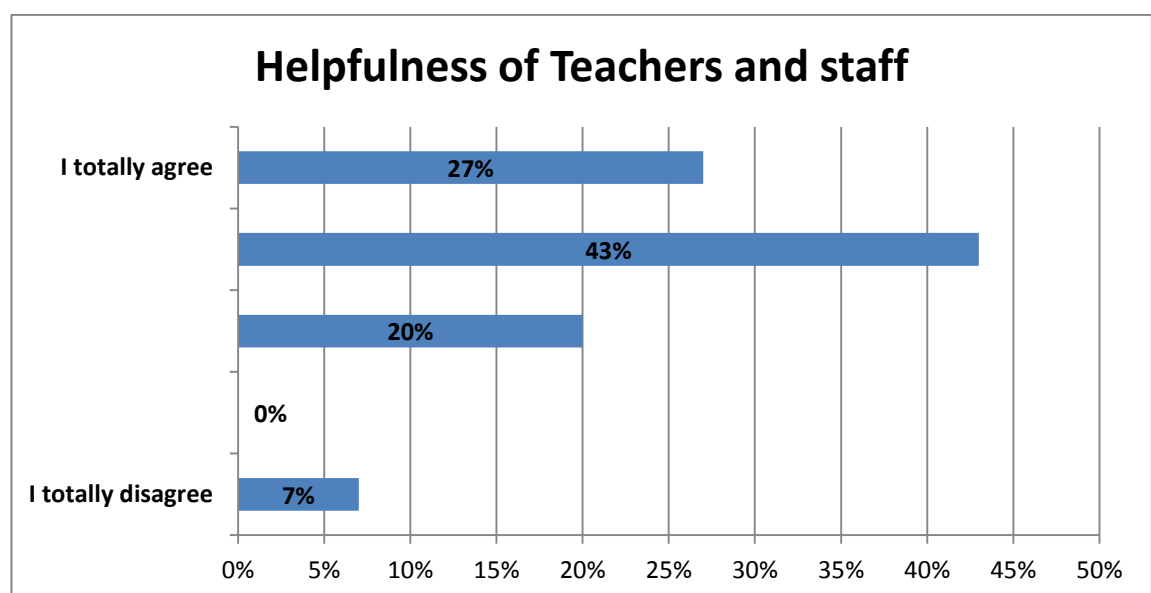
GRAPH 10. Meeting the expectations of students



The above graph was prepared on the basis of feedback received from the students. In the e-survey a scale of 1-5 was used for measurement ranging from “not at all” to “Completely”. None of the students considered that their expectations had been met by studying at COU. This has to be followed up by the administration to understand the needs of the students in order to provide them the best available education from COU’s Degree Programme in Tourism. COU also has the role to shape the level of expectation of the students. A majority of the students considered COU as being an average level when it comes to meeting the students’ expectations. Only 17% of the students’ responses were considered to be above average when it came to meet their expectation level.

### 5.1.6 Helpfulness of teachers and staff

Learning is the main core service provided at COU but there are other facilitating services as vital to making studies a great experience for the students. Every day there are numerous opportunities for the students to meet with the teachers and office staff. Some students might require counselling outside the class room, or to ask for information from the office staff. Students are to decide the level of help they receive.

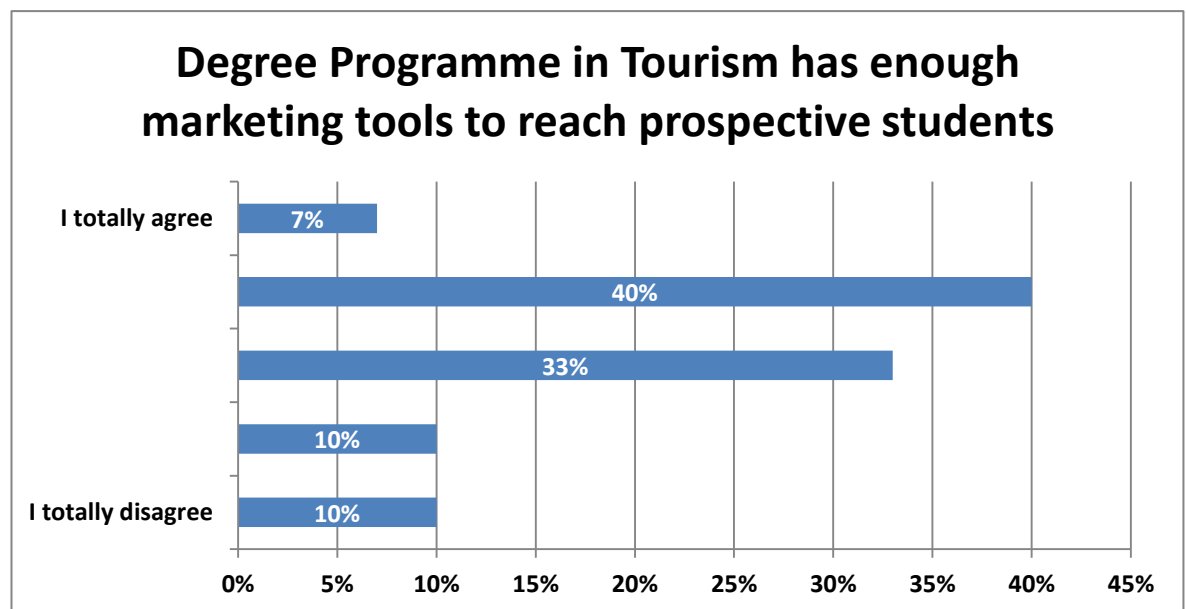


GRAPH 11. Helpfulness of teachers and staff

The research revealed that teachers and staff are highly efficient during performing their duties. 27% of the students totally agreed with this statement. 43% of the students revealed positive opinions with the above statement. Only a small number (7%) of the students disagreed with the statement. This clearly indicates that a large number of students hold positive remarks about the teachers and the staff associated with the Degree Programme in Tourism.

### 5.7 Marketing of the Degree Programme in Tourism

Marketing of a study programme is necessary to gain attention from future students. Prospective students have to know where they have a possibility to study and about the future career opportunities available for them. This would be one of the first contact tools with the service provider (COU) and prospective customer (Students). Students have different views on marketing of the Degree Programme in Tourism. Most students think that COU's Degree Programme in Tourism has enough marketing to reach future students.



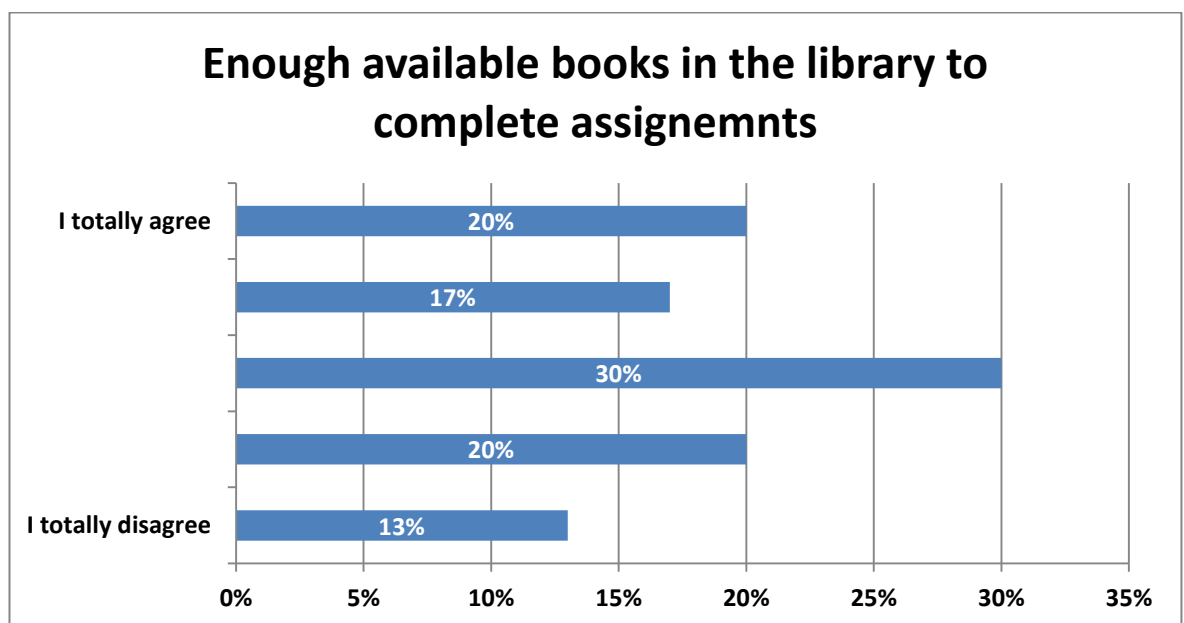
GRAPH 12. Marketing of the Degree Programme in Tourism

The graph above shows that a higher number of students consider the current marketing tools as effective in reaching future students. In the beginning of the report it was clear that

most students came to study tourism at COU because of its good quality of education. Students had heard about the Degree Programme in Tourism and known about its reputation. The result clearly shows that the marketing and communication team of the Degree Programme in Tourism has been successful in reaching out to future students.

### 5.1.8 Availability of books in the library

Books are an important source to gather knowledge. Students have different views about the availability of books in the library. Books are needed for the completion of assignments and to course work. One third of the students considered that there were not enough books in the library to do their assignments. More than one third of the students thought there were enough books to complete their assignment.

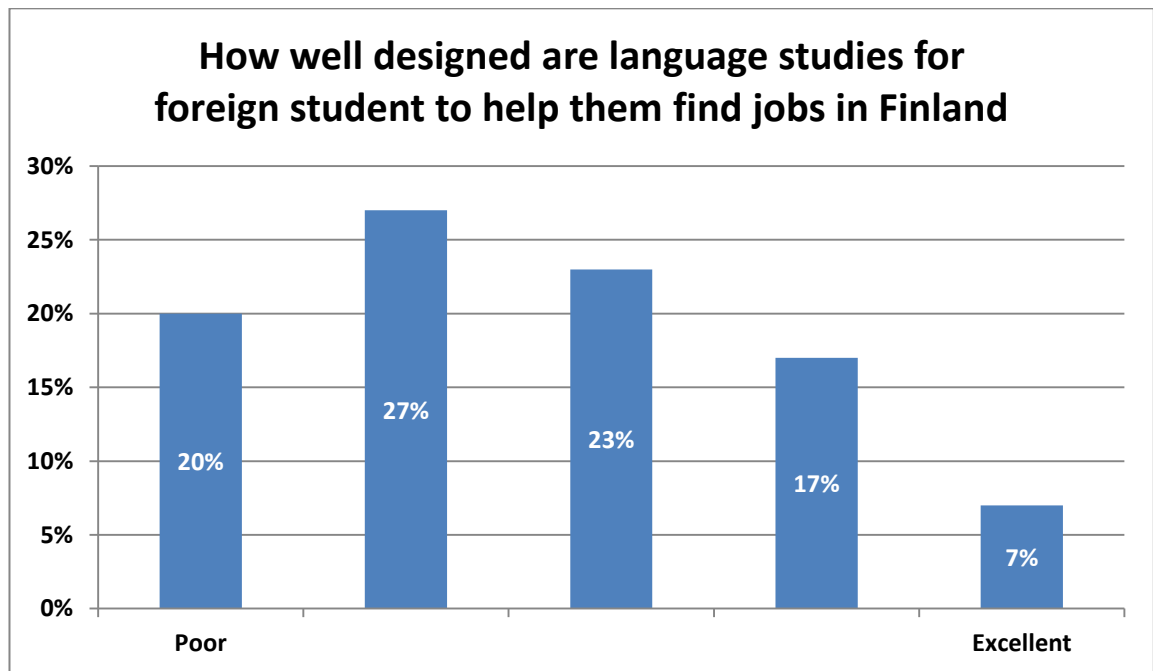


GRAPH 13. Enough available books in the library to complete assignment

The graph above presents very little variation in different opinions regarding the above statement. But a majority (30%) of the students perceived this book supply to be on an average level. But a thing to be noted, is that the total number of agreement (20%) is larger than total number of disagreement (13%).

### 5.1.9 Language studies for foreign students

Preparing students for the future job market is one of the main responsibilities of Universities of Applied Sciences (Ammattikorkeakoulu) in Finland. In the Degree Programme in Tourism at COU majority of the students come from abroad. Foreign students in Finland are often excluded from the job market due to a lack of language skills in Finnish or Swedish. Many of the students leave after finishing their study in Finland. Finnish educational institutions should prepare the foreign students with adequate local language skills to be qualified for the Finnish job market. A majority of students consider the language studies to not be well designed to find jobs in Finland after they have finished their degree, or during the studies.

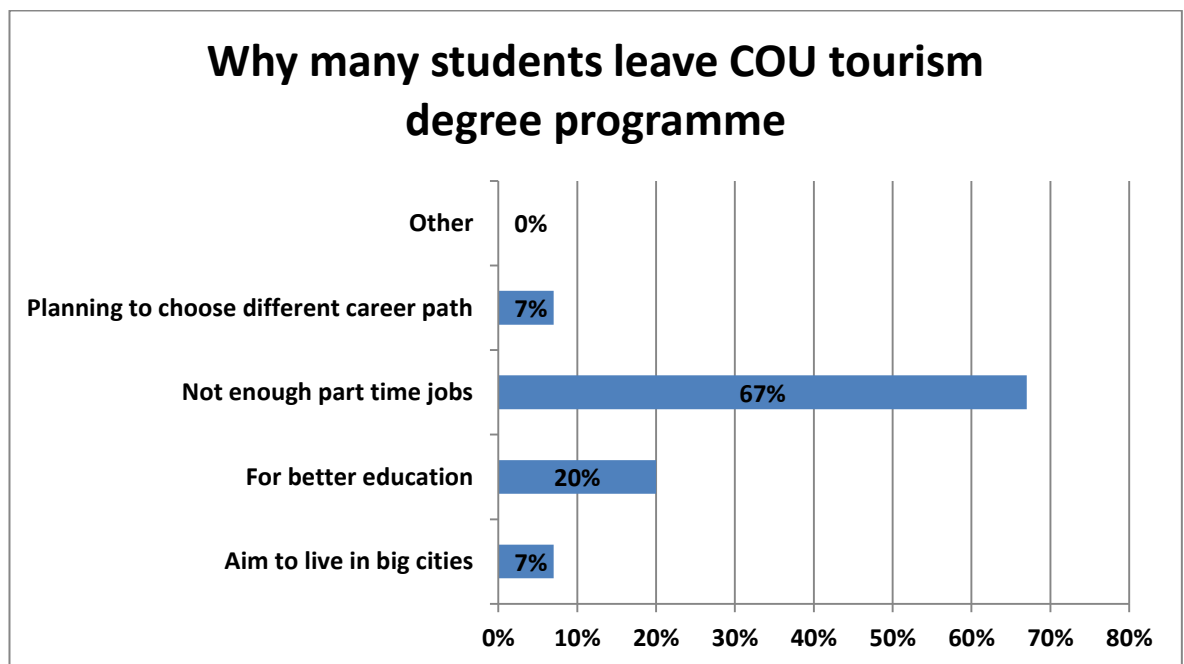


GRAPH 14. How well-designed are language studies for foreign student

The graph above was created with a scale of 1-5 ranging from “Poor” to “Excellent” in the survey. A majority of the students considered the language studies as not being well planned to achieve sufficient skills to apply for jobs in Finland. The design of language studies for foreign students is poorly perceived by a large number (20%) of students. In contrasts, the design of language studies was excellently perceived by a very small number (7%) of students.

### 5.1.10 Reasons students leave COU's Degree Programme in Tourism

There have been a significant number of students who have left the study programme and changed to other universities. The biggest reason was that Pietarsaari is a small town; there is a shortage of finding part time jobs for the students. A great number of students considered part time job as the main motives to why students are not continuing their studies in the Degree Programme in Tourism.

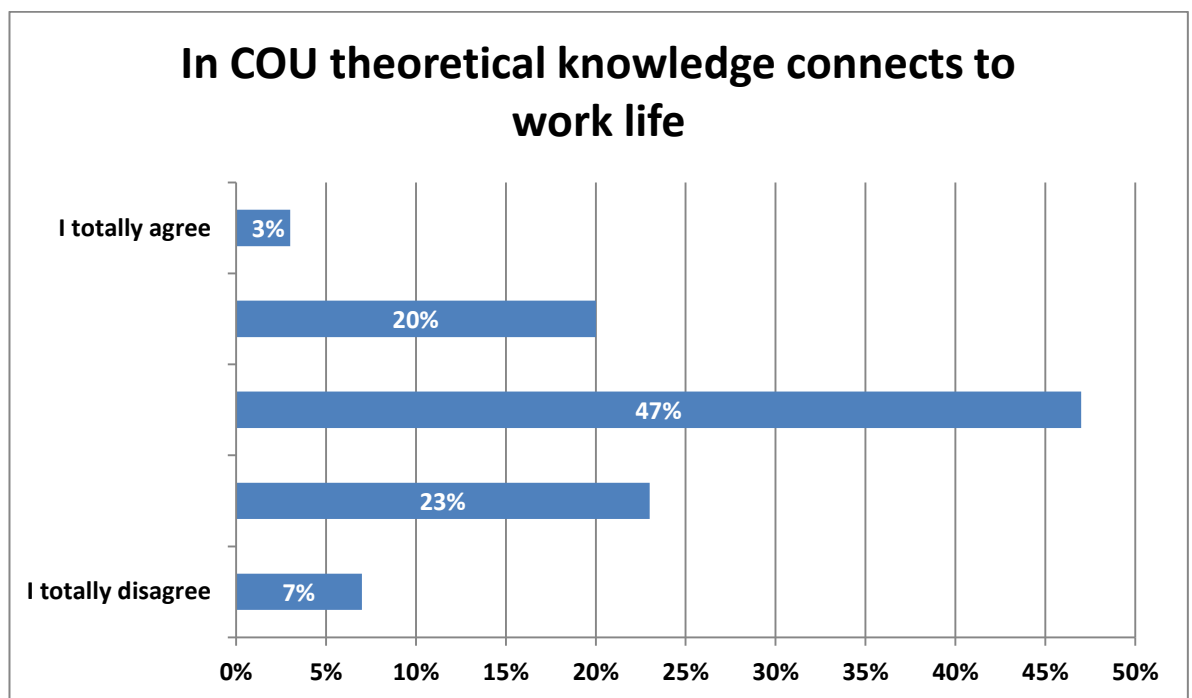


GRAPH 15. Reasons for leaving COU's tourism degree programme

The graph above indicates that a majority of the students think that not enough part time job is something that makes students change education programme. There are more than half of the respondents (67%), agreeing on this matter. The next reason for changing education programme is that students want to have better education than they receive at COU but the number is relatively low (20%). Other reasons for quitting were aim to live in bigger cities (7%) and planning to choose a different career path (7%).

### 5.1.11 Theoretical knowledge connects to work life

A majority of students think that the theoretical knowledge provided at COU does not connect to work life. This is a critical matter for discussion as the respondents are students of the Degree Programme in Tourism. With the help of technology student are now able to communicate with the whole world. Free flow of information has made it possible to compare customer services from around the world. The expectation levels have changed, or in one work it has risen high. The old model of services strategy might have been efficient previously but not anymore. Organization providing education services are also required to change their strategy according to the market needs. As one third of the students considered the theoretical knowledge provided here at COU to not really having any connection to the work life, it must be upsetting for the students as they are preparing for their future work life.

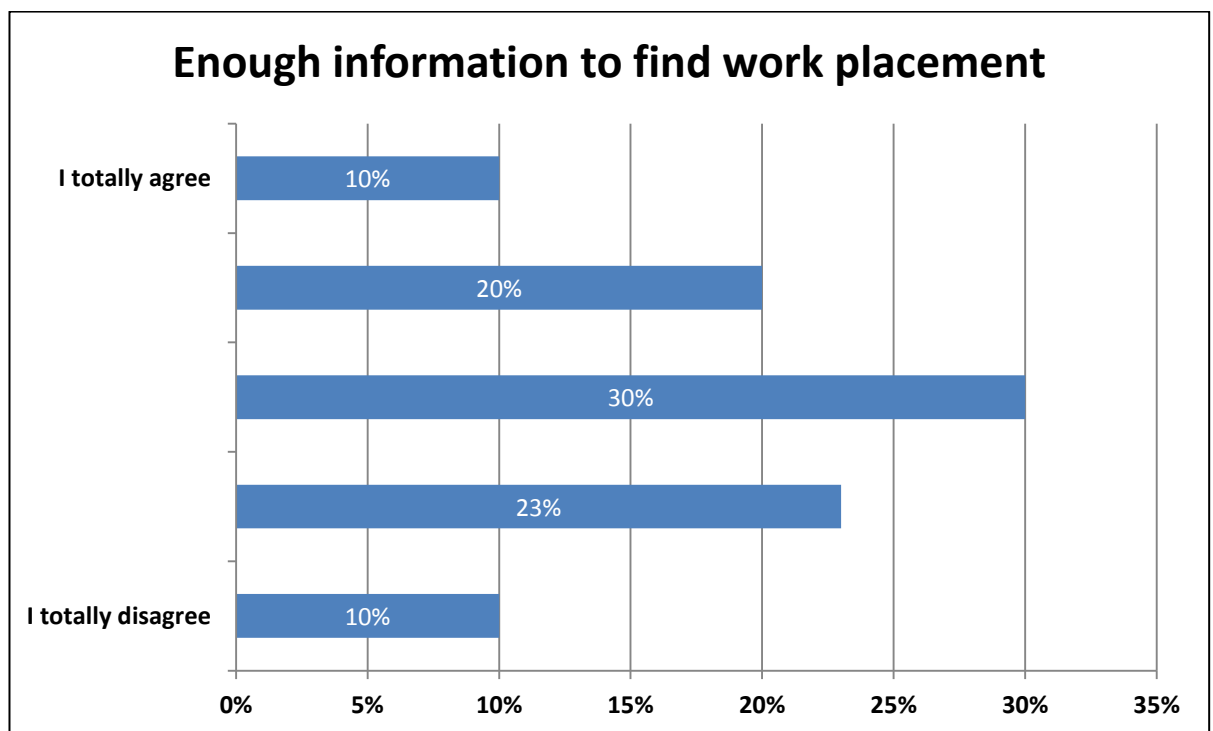


GRAPH 16. Theoretical knowledge connects to work life

The graph above shows the extent of agreement with the above statement by the students. The scale (1-5) was used to measure the students' opinions. Where 1 represents total disagreement, 5 represents total agreement with the statement. A majority of the students (47%) considered that theoretical knowledge is only averagely connected to working life.

### 5.1.12 Enough information to find work placement

Work placement is an important requisite for students in order to complete the 3.5 years Degree Programme in Tourism. It consists of 30 credit hours which can be completed in Finland or abroad. Information sessions are held from time to time to inform the students about the work placement. Students are encouraged to find a work placement place at their own initiative both in Finland and abroad. Almost one third of the students consider the information provided here enough for them to find a place for training. These can be related to foreign students having difficulty to find work placement as they are not efficient enough to communicate in local languages. A large numbers of foreign students are studying the Degree Programme in Tourism as shown in the beginning of the report. Their opinion may increase the level of disagreement during the research.



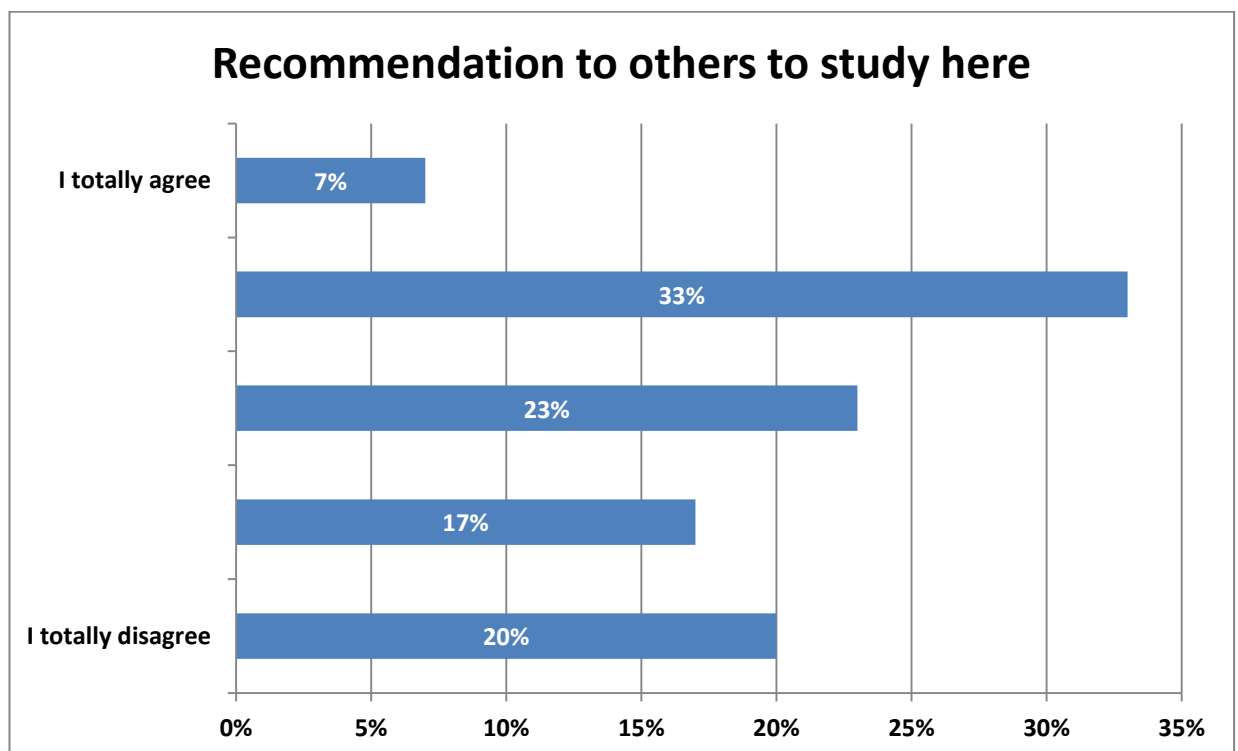
GRAPH 17. Enough information is provided about work placement

A majority of the students (30%) considered the information they receive as not being enough to find a work placement for them. Only a small number of students (10%) are agreed with the above statement. Students have mixed opinions on this issue as there is variable extent of opinions expressed. This graph also suggests that some changes also

need to be made to eliminate miscommunication between students and COU to provide clear guidelines to find a place for work placement.

### 5.1.13 Recommendation to others to study at COU

In the beginning of this report it is shown that many students came to study here by getting a recommendation from friends and family members. It is an important tool to reach to future students. When students' expectations are well managed this will improve the word of mouth publicity. A great number of students considered that they will recommend others also to study at COU. This should be considered as a positive feedback from the students. In contrast, almost one quarter of students considered not to suggest to others to study at COU, perhaps they had negative experiences of studying at COU. The quality control board has to find out the reasons for such dissatisfaction to reduce the number in the future.



GRAPH 18. Recommendation to others to study at COU



The graph above was based on the students' responses and shows that a great number of students were actually willing to tell others to study in the same study programme that they have studied in. This positive attitude shows a high satisfaction level among students, in contrast to one-fifth of the students who were totally disagreeing with the query.

## **5.2 Findings from the qualitative research**

The important part of qualitative research is to analyse data to prepare an unbiased report to benefit the commissioner of this research. The below report is written based on several themes. The findings are reported in this written document. The main findings are described below.

### **5.2.1 The reason for choosing this university**

Finland is known as a highly developed, country with a low level of corruption, good infrastructure and highly industrialized. Its generous education system attracts thousands of foreign students from around the world. Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences has been a partner institution with more than 40 different institutions ranging from Asia, Europe, South America, North America and Africa. Exchange students get the opportunity to come to study at COU for one semester or two semesters.

The exchange students chose this university as they wanted to explore Finland, so they came to study at COU. Usually an institution may have many partnership contracts with many institutions from the same country. Karlshochschule International University from Germany has partnership contract with two universities of applied sciences in Finland. The two institutions are Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences (COU) and Lahti University of Applied Sciences( LAMK). When the students chose COU instead of LAMK, it means that COU had more appeal to student from Karlshochschule International University.

Some students have chosen Finland because they thought Finland was cheaper, with lower living costs. Usually Finland is known for high expenses compared to other parts of the world but there are countries which are more expensive than Finland. So it is also possible

to attract students from more expensive countries (e.g. Switzerland) to Finland. The exchange students who studied at COU had made a presentation about this university had to motivate other students to choose COU for exchange study. Usually students had found information about Pietarsaari city through the Internet and they decided to come here to study, so the Internet has an important role for affecting the decision making in choosing a place for study. There is no marketing tool used by COU to attract exchange students, neither does the international office provide any information about COU. There is another important matter when choosing a place for student, and that is money. Destinations with cheaper living costs will have more appeal to students.

### **5.2.2 Offered courses**

Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences did not have any structured courses especially designed for exchange students. Exchange students found it very confusing as they did not know beforehand what courses they could study during their exchange period. This could be really frustrating sometimes when there was no mental preparation concerning what they were going to study as exchange students.

Most of the courses offered were totally based on basic tourism studies which, did not have any connection with business studies. Students had actually studied them before they came to COU, or they were not related at all to their own university degree curriculum. There are some business courses available but those courses were taught in Finnish or in Swedish. So the exchange students had no opportunity to take those courses. One student mentioned that “Tourism in Finland” a five credit course at COU which was studied by the exchange student, only gave him three credits at his home institution which was a cause of concern for him.

### **5.2.3 Multicultural experience**

Leaning in a multicultural environment is an unique selling point for any education provider. In today’s world students are competing globally for work places. Rapid globalization and swift flow of information have made things more competitive. Looking for a job abroad is not a seen as a superfluous thing in today’s job market. To get better

opportunity people often go to abroad to look for work. Due to financial crisis many people are moving to emerging nations to have better opportunities (BBC 2011). The tourism field is so diverse and large that often it requires working with people from different countries. The tourists are often coming from different countries. That is why multi-cultural experience is a valuable asset to any body's career. Employers appreciate prospective employees with a diverse knowledge of different cultures. Especially in large international corporations employees come from various nationalities. Studying in a multi-cultural environment definitely will help students in the future to work in large multinational organizations.

Studying at COU was a real multicultural experience for the exchange students rather than only Finnish experiences. In COU, on the Pietarsaari campus there are more than 22 nationalities of students who are studying, so it was a nice and valuable experience for them. They were able to make friends with students from different nationalities and Finnish friends as well. For some of the exchange students it was the first time abroad so they enjoyed being at COU with many international students.

#### **5.2.4 Teaching methods**

The study techniques at COU were quite different when compared by the exchange students to their home institutions' method. The main differences were in teaching methods, studying techniques and assessing method of students. Group work and group discussion were main features in studying at COU, in contrast, the exchange students had few group work studies in their home institution. Instead they had more lectures from the teachers which they had to listen to very carefully. They also mentioned that during their exchange study in COU they could not catch up what books to study for the course as books are not usually used in the classes. But it was not difficult for the exchange students to catch up with the system. They said they had already the same kind of theoretical studies before they came here. One concern mentioned by exchange students was that not all students were active during the group work when an assignment was given by the teachers. Some students were lazy to do the assignments which sometimes frustrated the exchange students. Sometimes the group members were not really active in the group work.

The exchange students thought that the teachers could be stricter on group work and assignment things. When it was told to them that if anybody submitted the assignment after the deadline they would get a half mark for the assignment. They told that there was no opportunity to get half when anyone submits assignment after the deadline, but instead they get failed for the assignment in their home institution. So students know how to plan their work in advance. In this context, teachers in other western countries are more strict about getting the assignment done by the student on time.

The exchange student expressed that studying at COU was very easy and flexible, and often it was very flexible. Questions asked in the exam were very basic, and short answers to write in the exam paper. In their home institution they had to study for a long time to prepare for the exam but here it was too easy for them to get passed because the questions asked were too easy and only short answers to write. The exchange students were surprised when there were still some students who failed even the exam questions were so easy.

At the same time they appreciated group work if it was done properly and if all the members of the group were active, otherwise it was a burden for some students. Group work is an excellent way of preparing oneself to work in a multicultural environment in the near future. In a work place there are always people with different mentalities, capabilities and nature so it is all the members' duty to keep working with different kinds of people.

### **5.2.5 Teaching personnel**

“Teachers are really nice as a person but not as teachers they need more professional knowledge about their teaching subject” was a statement that appeared during the interview and all the interviewees were agreeing on that. From their context this study place is more like a school with a lot of homework and assignments rather than a higher education where people learn for themselves on their own time with their own responsibility. This is a clear sign of that different countries and different institutions have a different approach towards educating tourism students in higher education. Culture has a big influence during the interpretation of the different approaches in teaching. The exchange students found studying at COU so easy, teachers are flexible and techniques used for teaching are quite elementary.

### **5.2.6 Study environment**

The exchange students praised the overall study environment in COU. They appreciated the opportunity they found during their study from the school. They had mentioned that the printing possibility, enough computers to do assignments were excellent. IT person were helpful to them when they needed any help and which they think is very good. The COU portal has been very helpful for them during their studies and they liked it. The University has enough plans and programs for students to take part in and they had the opportunity to meet with other exchange students from other campuses. They also appreciated Pietarsaari student union's (PAKO) activity as they organised many events for them which was something they did not have in their own institution.

When the exchange students asked for things the staff were slow in processing things. Something that frustrated them was the learning agreement which took 3 months to reach them, perhaps because the international co-ordinator was in a business meeting or on a trip abroad. At the same time their experience about Finnish culture was that people do things slowly compared with their own country. But they have been told that people want things to be perfect so they take their time. They have appreciated this also and were able to compare this with their own culture. A small campus is nice for studying and it was more like a family environment. All the staff was very friendly, helpful and nice.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

There are a few things that could be changed during the research which were realized after conducting the research. Professional help could be asked for when preparing the e-survey questions and before sending it out to the students. There should have been a possibility to do some interview with professionals in the educational field to make the research more trustworthy. Due to lack of academic and professional knowledge the research was confined to only students' opinions, not assessing the teaching quality of teachers or any academic procedures. Future research should be carried out to get a deeper knowledge about the research question.

Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences is one of the most popular places for studying tourism and it has one of the largest numbers of student intake per academic year in the Degree Programme in Tourism. Through the research it is manifested that large numbers of students come to study tourism due to its good reputation as a tourism education provider. More than three fourths of the students come from outside of Finland. They have a high expectation on studying tourism at COU. Even though there are different nationalities of students, they still consider the tourism education at COU to be on a higher level than average. They consider the level of education to be on just on average level when it comes to fulfilling their expectation. The research shows a clear indication of that teachers and office staff have a genuinely helpful and friendly attitude towards the students.

However, a majority of the students think that the education provided at COU could be more connected to real working life. Students think COU provides enough information for work placement. There are shortages of books in the library for the students to complete their assignments which could be remembered in the future for improvement. Students consider the present the language studies provided by COU as not enough to find a job in Finland after completing their studies. Many students left the Degree Programme in Tourism due to the lack of enough part time jobs in the Pietarsaari town. Even though a few of the criteria have presented average satisfaction level from the students, majority of the students still consider to recommend other students to come to study at COU. That also

can be interpreted as that, students put higher trust in COU as a good education provider. This can be considered as 'brand loyalty' which is often discussed in business studies.

It was really good to know what exchange students think about studying at COU. This report will help to improve things that lack behind. They have said they will recommend COU to other students in their home; students to come for exchange study but not for the whole three and half year of studies. They have appreciated the overall study experience here as it was fun, enjoyable and a wonderful experience, but their points of view regarding the academic level expressed some dissatisfaction.

This report is an attempt to recognize the competitiveness of the Degree Programme in Tourism at COU, by evaluating students' opinions. This action can be considered as a small step stone towards improvement of the Degree Programme in Tourism by considering service from students' points of view, as they are one of the important stakeholders of COU. Strong efforts have been taken to make the research as successful and informative as possible, so the outcome of the research would be easy to interpret by COU (commissioner) and by other future users. Due to the lack of resources the researcher could not access all the required information which might be helpful to improve the quality of the research. This research is a first time effort by the author to conduct such research and the motivation behind the research is to complete academic degree study. Lack of professional and experienced use of words might be noticeable throughout the report. The validity and reliability also have to be considered before making any general remark of the outcome of the research, as discussed earlier in the validity and reliability section.

The outcome of the research could be used to improve the areas where changes are needed. Sufficient books should be provided in the library so students have more opportunity to study the books to complete the assignments. The present number of students will increase when new students from the academic year 2012-2013 will start their studies in the autumn of 2012. Exchange of information and knowledge should be enhanced by inviting guest lecturers and industry personnel from Finland and abroad. Practical knowledge of the students could be improved by arranging tourism workshops on international, national and regional levels. Attaining membership in international tourism educational bodies would definitely increase competitive advantage of COU. The chances of employment for foreign students can be increase by redesigning the language studies for foreign students. In the future, the job growth in the tourism sector will continue to rise due to Finland's presence

in many international indexes. Many people would like to visit the unspoiled nature of northern Europe. Finland's tourism vision 2020 had well defined why tourism is important for the national economy. Authorities are now more aware to promote tourism in Finland. COU has one of the highest numbers of student intakes to the Degree Programme in Tourism. Along with Finnish students, foreign students with tourism knowledge and Finnish language skills will minimise the shortage of labour in the tourism industry in the coming years. As an organization COU must be able to ensure that all the stakeholders are able to follow the vision of COU and to work to achieve that vision.



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## ***Tourism students survey***

Please fill up the short survey which is a part of my research to measure the competitiveness of tourism degree programme in Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied sciences(COU) in Pietarsaari campus. Please take part freely to improve the tourism degree programme. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that all the information are confidential and for research purpose only.

Best Regards  
Saifur Rahman

### **Please choose starting of your study year**

- ☒ DPT 08
- ☐ DPT 09
- ☐ DPT 10
- ☐ DPT 11

### **Are you a foreign or domestic student?**

- ☒ Foreign
- ☐ Domestic

### **Why did you choose to study tourism in COU?**

- ☒ Good quality of education
- ☐ Nearby
- ☐ Bilingual small city
- ☐ Recommendation from friends and family
- ☐ Reputation of COU
- ☐ Many facilities for the students
- ☐ Other:

**How do you rate the overall study environment?**

1 2 3 4 5

poor ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Excellent

**Does COU tourism degree programme fulfill your expectation?**

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Completely

**Teachers and staffs are helpful and friendly**

1 2 3 4 5

I totally disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I totally agree

**Does tourism degree programme has enough marketing to reach prospective students**

1 2 3 4 5

I totally disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I totally agree

**Enough books to borrow from library to complete required assignments**

1 2 3 4 5

I totally disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I totally agree

**For foreign student language studies is well designed to find jobs in Finland after finishing study**

1 2 3 4 5

Poor ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Excellent

**Why some students want to move to other university of study programme?**

- ☒ Aim to live in big cities  
☐ For better education  
☐ Not enough part time jobs  
☐ Planning to choose different career path  
☐ Other:

**In COU theoretical knowledge connects to practical work life**

1   2   3   4   5

I totally disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I totally agree

**COU provide enough information about work placement**

1   2   3   4   5

I totally disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I totally agree

**Will you recommend others to study here**

1   2   3   4   5

I totally disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I totally agree

**Anything would you like to mention about tourism degree programme**